

Her 1968 Olympic medals and work with teen-age moms make Linda McGuire a...

# Lifetime champion



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Linda McGuire enjoys her job at Santa Cruz High, where she influences the lives and decisions of teen-age mothers.

## Swimmer distances herself from sport, accomplishments

*Editor's note: This is the third in a series of profiles on the Top 10 athletes in Santa Cruz County history, as voted by Sentinel readers*

By **JIM SEIMAS**  
Sentinel staff writer

**M**ORE than 30 years ago, bright-eyed, 18-year-old Linda Gustavson won three medals at the 1968 Olympics in swimming, a sport in which she no longer enjoys participating.

Shortly after the once-in-a-lifetime experience, she never looked back on the sport. And at the time, there wasn't much more, especially for women.

"I really don't like to swim unless it's like Hawaii," she said. "I think of all those years of being wet and cold. I really don't know how to swim unless I'm swimming laps."

Few would envy her grueling daily routine, which she began at age 12. Gustavson, who later attended Soquel High, would wake up at 4 a.m. and her late father Jack drove her to and from practice in Santa Clara.

Jack sold his successful fresh fruit business in downtown Santa Cruz to attend to his daughter. Because swim goggles weren't available then, Jack didn't want his daughter to drive winding Highway 17 af-

# 8

Santa Cruz County Sentinel's  
**CENTURY**  
Team

LINDA MCGUIRE

ter spending much of the morning in chlorine. So he didn't mind the daily grind.

"She would probably wake up at 4 a.m., swim laps for a couple of hours and be in biology class by 8 a.m.," said husband and classmate Tim McGuire, who asked Gustavson out twice in high school, but his offers were declined. Nothing personal, she had swim functions to attend, Tim recalled.

After dating for two years, Gustavson married McGuire in 1972. They live in Santa Cruz and have two children, Kelly, 18, who attends Indiana University, and Kevin, 15, a junior basketball player at Harbor High.

Linda McGuire, 50, teaches the Teen-age Moms Program at Santa Cruz High. Every now and then a

call from a distressed student comes in at 2 a.m. But she always takes the time, regardless of the hour, to listen and offer advice.

Dedication from teachers like Gustavson have contributed to the state's teen-pregnancy drop the past three years. California also has the lowest rate in the nation.

"One student told her at a graduation, 'If I had a mom like you, I would've never been in this program,'" Tim said.

It has been a long time since Gustavson won gold in the 4x100-meter freestyle relay, silver in the 400 freestyle, and bronze in the 100 freestyle.

The medals are discolored and rest in a box underneath one of the family's televisions. "Was it first or third?" she said, trying to remember which leg she swam when she combined with Jane Barkman, Susan Pedersen and Jan Henne to win the 4x100 relay in a then Olympic-record time of 4:02.05. "I never thought about that. Isn't that horrible?"

It was the second leg.

There were no VCRs or camcorders at the time, and she has no film footage of the race. What photos and articles she had were lost when she lent them to



*'If I won three medals... I'd have them surgically implanted in my chest.'* — **Tim McGuire**

# McGuire

Continued from Page B1

a friend and never got them back.

In recent months, more than 100 nominees were compiled for the Sentinel's Athlete of the Century. Readers voted and Gustavson finished with the eighth-highest total.

## Career Highlights

- Swam second leg of gold-medal winning 4x100-meter relay team in 1968 Olympics
- Took silver medal in 400-meter freestyle (4:35.5)
- Took bronze medal in 100-meter freestyle (1:00.3)

Which means others are aware of her significant feats, though Gustavson is humble about them. Still, Tim, the athletics director at Harbor, enjoys embarrassing his wife by publicly praising her.

"If I won three medals at the Olympics, I would have them surgically implanted in my chest," her husband said. "And I wouldn't wear a shirt."

She remains the only Santa Cruz County native to have won Olympic gold. Linda is grateful to have experienced the Olympics.

Times have dramatically dropped — the world-record time she set in the Olympic trials in the 200 freestyle (2:07.9 on a 50-meter pool), wouldn't have even qualified her for the trials nowadays. The long-course world record is now 1:56.78.

Modesty is Linda's demeanor, though she has been prodded by students and teachers to bring her medals to classrooms throughout the county.

"I let the kids handle them," she said. "The gold almost doesn't look gold any more because of oil on peoples' hands. But I figure that's what they're there for. Why have them and not touch them? Let them sit behind a glass on a stand?"

Tim said he hopes to someday get rich and have the gold medal re-dipped.

Because Linda has no film or photos of the historic event, time has taken its toll. The specifics of

winning Olympic gold when she was a freshman at Cabrillo College have slipped her mind, but the feeling of being rewarded for years of hard work on an international stage still lingers.

"I don't especially dwell on it now," she said. "It represents a lot of very hard work. Even if I didn't get a medal, I participated in the Olympics and that means a lot."

Gustavson, the third of four daughters, trained with older sisters Karen and Mary as a youth with the Santa Clara Swim Club. When the oldest two Gustavsons finished training with the club, it was decision time.

"I wasn't really that good at the time," Linda said. "But my coach, George Haines, told my parents, 'I think she should continue. She has potential.'"

Linda diverts credit for her Olympic success to Haines and her father and mother, Freddie, for driving her to practice.

Her feelings for Haines, who left the Bay Area and settled down in Northern California, are still strong.

After setting the world record in the 200 free in the preliminaries of the '68 Olympic Trials in Los Angeles, Gustavson entered the event's final stage of qualifying and took fourth. The top three the event advance to Mexico City for the Summer Olympics, which was held in October.

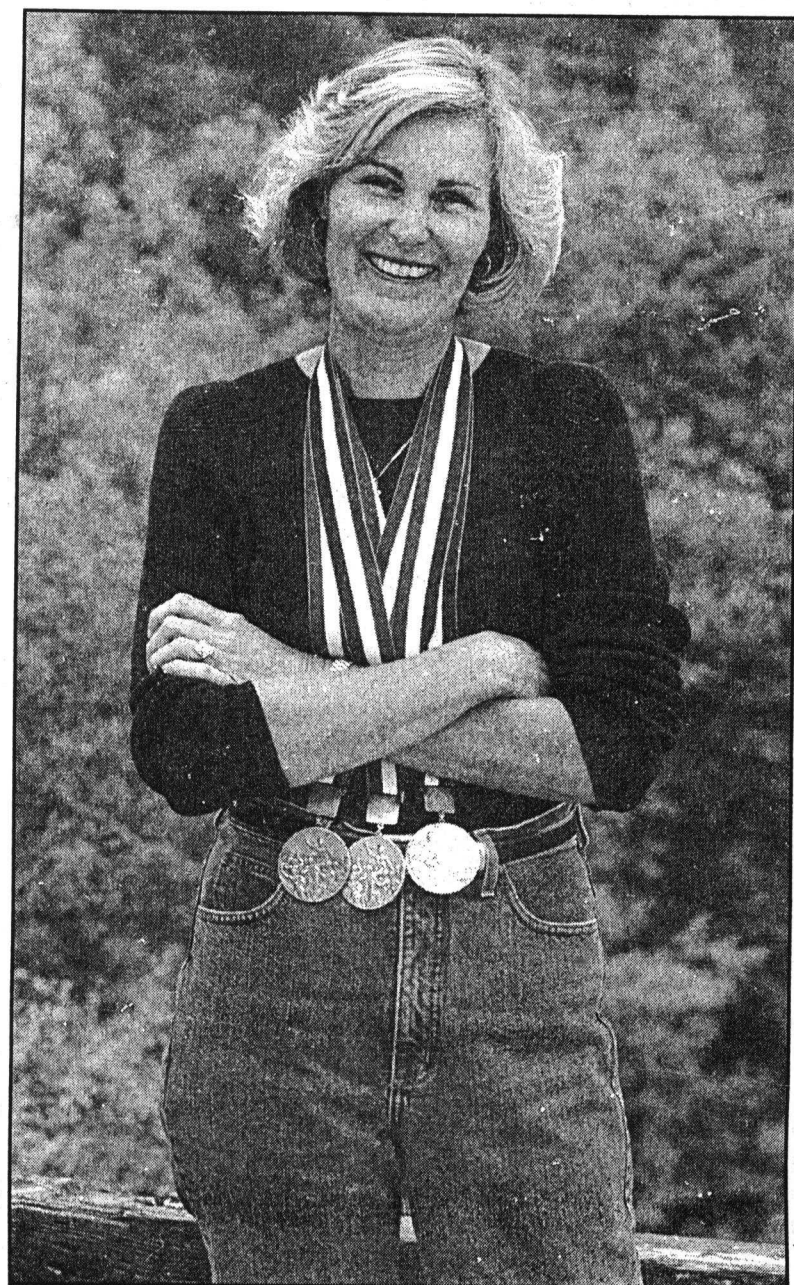
Gustavson failed to advance to the Olympics in the 200 free, her favorite and top event, by 0.02 of a second. Six hours after Gustavson set the world record, fellow American Debbie Meyer had broken it.

"The trials were far more scary and emotional than any meet I've ever competed in," Linda said. "It didn't matter what you had done in the past. If you weren't on that day, you were out."

At Haines' urging, he inspired a distraught and upset Gustavson in a heartfelt, 45-minute conversation.

The result: "I'm convinced she went out and qualified in events she shouldn't have. Haines was the ultimate women's coach," Tim said.

After high school, Gustavson went to Cabrillo for a year and



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file photo

Linda McGuire displays her 1968 Olympic medals in this 1996 photo.

transferred to Michigan State. At the time, Title IX didn't exist. Because of her status, the college suggested she only pay in-state tuition and bought her books. Most college programs weren't as demanding as a club.

"It was very low key," Linda said. "There was little training and no scholarships. All that time, it was a personal goal. There was nothing really beyond that."

With a degree in physical edu-

cation, she became a P.E. teacher and coach in the Bay Area.

But raising a family and guiding youngsters were areas she really wanted to make an impact.

After a few years of coaching basketball and swimming, she landed a job at Santa Cruz High.

Each day, Linda said, she feels rewarded by helping youngsters. It helps her appreciate the love of her family. It's another type of medal — one that doesn't fade.