AANA Past-President Mary Alice Costello Dies

Mary Alice Costello, CRNA, 1963-64 AANA president and founder of the University of Cincinnati Nurse Anesthesia Program, died on Dec. 26, 2001 at the age of 84 after a long illness. Her funeral was held on Dec. 29 in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Costello is remembered as a highly respected and popular advocate for nurse anesthesia. “Mary Alice was a dynamic personality in promoting nurse anesthesia throughout her career as well as during her presidency,” said former AANA Executive Director John Garde, CRNA, MS, FAAN. “She was a true motivator and leader of the troops. When you met Mary Alice Costello you never forgot her; you would go away from meeting her motivated to take on the world,” Garde added. Patrick Downey, CRNA, 1983-84 AANA president agrees: “When Mary Alice walked into a room, the room stood up out of absolute respect.” “But she never took advantage of that,” he added. “She was very humble and a generous, sharing person.”

An Advocate for Nurse Anesthesia

An AANA member since 1943, Costello served the Association in a variety of capacities in addition to her 1963-64 term as president. She was a trustee from 1949 to 1956 and chaired the Curriculum Committee, the Educational Loan and Scholarship Committee, and the Nominating Committee. Costello was also active on the state level, having served as president of the Ohio Association of Nurse Anesthetists from 1946-47 and as a member of many committees.

Costello graduated from Mercy Hospital School of Nursing in Hamilton, Ohio and Cincinnati Hospital School of Anesthesia. In 1945 she founded the Cincinnati General Hospital School of Anesthesia for Nurses (later the University of Cincinnati School of Nurse Anesthesia), where she served as program director for 27 years. “She was a brilliant anesthetist, fondly remembered by her many graduates as an outstanding educator and exceptional clinician. Her focus was in the continued advancement of anesthesia, as well as anesthesia safety,” remembered Wanda Wilson, CRNA, PhD, program director of the University of Cincinnati Nurse Anesthesia Program.

A True Anesthesia Pioneer

When Costello received the AANA Helen Lamb Outstanding Educator Award in 1987, it was noted that she was a true pioneer of nurse anesthesia. She was the first Nurse Anesthetist to become adept at the administration of regional anesthesia, a skill for which she became renowned and that she passed on to CRNAs from around the country. “Mary Alice was the one of the first to promote educating nurse anesthetists in regional anesthesia. She taught many CRNAs how to intubate patients, including my own program director, St. Yvonne Jeter,” said Garde.

Costello was a lifelong advocate for nurse anesthesia education. “Even after her retirement she continued to follow the progress of the Nurse Anesthesia Program and faculty,” said Wilson. “She was the ultimate ‘cheerleader’ for those teaching in the Nurse Anesthesia Program. Any accomplishment was noted with a phone call or a congratulatory note. The University of Cincinnati Nurse Anesthesia Program is indebted to Mary Alice Costello for her contributions to the profession of Nurse Anesthesia.”

Memorial donations may be sent to St. Rita School for the Deaf, 1720 Glendale Milford Rd., Cincinnati, OH 45215; or Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 3949 Colerain Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45223.