



Women's History Month



Sister Jane Gates

Sister Kathryn Volker

Sister Eunice Cudzewicz

Sister Patricia Edelen

To celebrate Women's History Month we are sharing an inspiring story of four of our Sisters who made a major impact in the small town of Lumpkin, GA.

Sister Dr. Jane Gates had completed six years of serving as Superior General of Medical Mission Sisters in the early 1970's. After taking some refresher courses she was eager to use her hands again as a surgeon. In 1977, she and Sr. Patricia Edelen (a pharmacist) and two nurses, Srs. Kathryn Volker, and Eunice Cudzewicz opened a medical clinic in the small rural town of Lumpkin, Georgia.

Upon their arrival the people in the town were apprehensive of these northern, white, Catholic women. Some of the members of the town would say things like “We don’t want no damn Yankee do-gooders coming down here, raising ruckus and then leaving us to hold the hurt!” The Sisters eventually won the trust of the townspeople, welcoming everyone to the clinic and providing quality care. They were not only pioneers in healthcare in the small town of Lumpkin, but also pioneers of race relations.

Lumpkin was traditionally segregated; historically the waiting rooms in the clinic, when they had one, were segregated. This was a culture shock for the Sisters, who came from places where segregation was a thing of the past. They decided to have one waiting room for everyone: white, black, or other people of color.

During their time in Lumpkin the four women experienced not only success but also tragedy when Sr. Kathryn was diagnosed with Stage 4 ovarian cancer. She entered eternal rest on April 6, 1983. Her memorial service was held in the local gym, the only building with enough space to accommodate all the mourners. The people of Lumpkin joined together despite race, denomination, or economic class to honor Sr. Kathryn.

Quality medical care became more accessible to the town in the mid-80’s; Srs. Jane, Pat and Eunice turned the clinic over and left Lumpkin. They returned to Philadelphia and continued their mission in other areas, remaining a community with each other. Sr. Eunice served as Society Communications Coordinator for thirty years, before turning over her responsibilities in 2021. Sr. Pat has been serving as the hospitality coordinator in Fox Chase. Sr. Jane Gates served in a variety of leadership positions and was called home on February 23, 2022. We honor these great women and the impact they made in the small town of Lumpkin that is still being felt to this day.



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