



# Get to Know Your PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

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**T**his year is an election year for the NATA membership. Leading up to voting this summer, NATA will share information about the two presidential candidates: Kathy Dieringer, EdD, LAT, ATC, and Katie Walsh Flanagan, EdD, LAT, ATC.

While the March *NATA News* featured information from the candidates about the issues important to them and their goals if elected president, this issue of *NATA News* looks at the human side of the candidates and who they are on a personal level and as athletic trainers. Visit the NATA Now blog, [www.nata.org/blog](http://www.nata.org/blog), to also read about the candidate's favorite thing about being an athletic trainer.

The new president will take office at the 72nd NATA Clinical Symposia & AT Expo in 2021 and will serve a three-year term. Learn more about this year's election in future issues of *NATA News*, on NATA's social media channels and on the presidential candidate webpage at [www.nata.org/nata-presidential-election](http://www.nata.org/nata-presidential-election). §

# Kathy Dieringer, EdD, LAT, ATC



**STATE/DISTRICT:** Texas, District Six

**HOMETOWN AND STATE:** Born Tawas City, Michigan; raised all over (Air Force family); lived the longest in Denton, Texas

**SETTING:** Clinic/youth sports

**PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT:** Owner of D&D Sports Med; three outpatient rehabilitation clinics in North Texas

**FAMILY:** Married to Susan, together for 15 years; four dogs: Putter, Dottie, Anni and Babe

**AWARDS:** 2020 Eastern Kentucky University Athletic Training Outstanding Alumnus Award; 2019 AOSM Most Distinguished Athletic Trainer Award; NATA Hall of Fame, Class of 2017; 2018 SWATA Eddie Wojecki Award; 2017 NATA Gail Weldon Award of Excellence; 2016 and 2000 SWATA Bobby Gunn Unsung Hero Award; 2007 SWATA Hall of Fame; 2006 NATA MDAT Award; 2002 NATA Athletic Trainer Service Award

## 1. WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO GET INTO ATHLETIC TRAINING?

I was in an introduction to physical education class my second year of college when I first learned about athletic training. I hadn't heard of athletic training prior to this class but was intrigued by the combination of medicine and sports. I was encouraged by the professor to visit the athletic training facility to learn more, and it was a life-changing event for me. "Hooked" doesn't adequately describe it. Over the next few years I was a sponge, learning anything and everything I could about this passion I had found. With every experience, I wanted to learn more, and that didn't change through graduate school or through any of my jobs. Lifelong learner is not just a cliché phrase but rather a philosophical standard of any health care provider. Learning

everything I can about the profession and health care continues to be my inspiration every day.

## 2. HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED WITH VOLUNTEERING WITHIN THE PROFESSION?

I was a young professional and had just moved back to my current district after spending some time in District Nine at Eastern Kentucky University and Florida State University. While at EKU, I learned from then-NATA President Bobby Barton, DA, ATC, LAT, the importance of professional service and witnessed it every day as he worked to improve the association and every member's professional life.

When I returned to District Six, I wasn't well-known by the district leadership, even though I had attended

undergrad at the University of Texas at Austin. I knew I wanted to get involved, so I approached our district director and volunteered. I had to do that three times before he put me on a committee (Convention Registration!). After a couple of years on the Convention Registration Committee, I was soon approached about serving on other committees and eventually appointed to the SWATA Executive Board.

Had I not been persistent with him, I certainly wouldn't be where I am today. I am so very grateful to him and to all my mentors who modeled professional service behavior and encouraged me to make a difference and "leave the profession better than you found it."

### **3. WHAT IS ON YOUR PROFESSIONAL BUCKET LIST?**

There have been many items on my professional bucket list throughout my career. I have accomplished several of them, including working at a Division I university, serving as head athletic trainer at the collegiate level, owning my own business and serving the profession at many levels. Now, my professional bucket list includes seeing a time when ATs are working wherever we wish, getting paid what we're worth and working in jobs that promote work-life balance so the attrition rate of our youngest professionals decreases. All of these are not only possible, but probable, as we increase our value in the global health care market. My final professional bucket list item is to serve as president of the NATA.

### **4. WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO IN YOUR FREE TIME?**

Anything outside. I come from a long lineage of farmers, so it's clearly in my DNA. I love spending time "working the soil" in the garden

and flower beds and still get child-like excited in the spring when the seeds are pushing through the dirt (Most green thumbs can relate to this). When I'm not ankle deep in the garden, I love to play golf and face the challenge of hitting that perfect shot, which rarely happens, but it doesn't keep me from trying. Finally, traveling is also a favorite when I can get away. I love to see different parts of the country as well as the world, to learn about other people, and experience the beauty of other cultures.

### **5. HOW DO YOU UNWIND AND RECHARGE AFTER A LONG DAY?**

Work-life balance is paramount to me. While I love my job, I do everything possible not to bring it home with me. As mentioned already, I love to be outside, whether it's playing with our dogs, weeding the garden or simply enjoying the outdoors on the back porch with a glass of wine – that's where I want to be. My other stress reducer is exercise, in whatever form I can find it. Walking our fur babies or time on the elliptical – few things clear the mind as well as exercise. The most important thing to me, though, is that I do indeed leave work at work and enjoy my down time.

### **6. TELL US A SURPRISING FACT ABOUT YOURSELF THAT NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW.**

Years ago, I learned how to play the guitar and was a member of various singing groups, choirs, etc., including a jazz ensemble. Music was, and still is, an outlet for me, as its power to lift me up, energize or be reflective is poignant and vital.

### **7. WHAT ITEM CAN'T YOU LIVE WITHOUT IN THE WORKPLACE?**

Our stereo. We have music playing as soon as we start the day, and it's the last thing we turn off before walking out the door.

Music is a huge part of the culture of our staff, and I love that. We typically participate in "name that song" or "name that artist" games, which of course engages the patients as well. Our staff is very diverse, and it's fascinating to hear the various music choices throughout the week, all of which contribute to the positive energy throughout the day.

### **8. YOU HAVE YOUR WALLET, PHONE AND KEYS – WHAT'S ONE OTHER THING YOU CAN'T LEAVE YOUR HOUSE WITHOUT?**

Coffee! And my briefcase with my laptop and documents for the various projects I am working on for the profession and my community.

### **9. DESCRIBE THAT "AH-HA" MOMENT WHEN YOU KNEW YOU WERE MEANT TO BE AN AT.**

There have been so many rewarding experiences with patients, times where they worked so hard to return after an injury or illness and the celebration we shared together after the return. The one that stands out happened in the first couple of years of my tenure as a head athletic trainer. We had gathered a group of faculty and health care providers to create policies to protect athletes on issues, such as disordered eating and substance abuse, at a time when they weren't yet prevalent in college athletics. One of our athletes, who had not previously revealed her struggles, was finally comfortable doing so and entered treatment. She shared with me later that those new policies likely saved her life. Developing such policies was a basic health care standard to me, but the realization of how powerful that was for that athlete, as well as many more to come, was the biggest ah-ha moment for me.

# Katie Walsh Flanagan, EdD, LAT, ATC



**STATE/DISTRICT:** North Carolina, District Three

**HOMETOWN AND STATE:** Carmel-by-the-Sea, California

**SETTING:** Higher education/collegiate

**PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT:** East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina

**FAMILY:** Husband Sean B. Flanagan; mother Phyllis Walsh Kelly; father Gerald Kelly; siblings Kevin, Bruce, Tim, Colleen, Ann, Jennifer, Matthew; stepson Sean R. Flanagan, (daughter-in-law Kate, grandchildren Owen and Edie); stepdaughter Kait McManus (son-in-law Rob McManus, grandchildren Gabby and Cole)

**AWARDS:** 2020 Kory Stringer Institute Lifesaving Educator Award; 2016 East Carolina University's University Integrity Award; North Carolina Athletic Trainers' Association Hall of Fame, Class of 2012; 2010 NATA Most Distinguished Athletic Trainer Award; 2008 East Carolina University Health & Human Performance College Service Award; 2006 NATA Service Award; 2006 Davey Award for Visual Arts, Medical Conditions in the Athlete Textbook; 2000 and 2006 North Carolina Athletic Trainers' Association College/University Athletic Trainer of the Year

## 1. WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO GET INTO ATHLETIC TRAINING?

I went to Oregon State University for my undergraduate education, walked on to the field hockey team during preseason and made the team. The first week of class, I was involved in a bicycle accident and broke a few ribs and the head of my radius in my elbow. I was sent to the student health center, and the physician there told me to see the athletic trainer. I had never heard of an AT before and was curious what this person could do that a physician could not. The AT taped me so I did not miss a single practice or game, which was forever life changing. I was intrigued and hooked by the training and abilities of this person.

At the time, there was no degree or major in athletic training, and I did not want to be a PE teacher, but I really wanted to be an athletic trainer. I asked the administration if I could go "rogue," so to speak, in my education. My diploma says "physical education," but after the athletic training classes, the majority of my credits were in graduate-level physiology. Both lessons taught me that "the answer is 'no' until you ask."

## 2. HOW DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED WITH VOLUNTEERING WITHIN THE PROFESSION?

My first time volunteering in athletic training was either stuffing packets for a meeting or volunteering at Special Olympics, as I can't recall the exact timing, but I was hooked. I absolutely love behind the scenes! It is the hustle and bustle, the comradery, the repetitive minutia that just has to get done to make the

whole event work. It is when you are fortunate enough to work together with a lot of different people to pull your collective resources and contribute to making something great happen. I love hidden gates and doors under the coliseum, stadium or convention center that takes volunteers to places quicker. The people all working collectively under the radar and with no expectation of praise because the work needs to be done. Volunteering is not giving away your professional skill set to provide health care. Volunteering is contributing however you can to make something awesome happen flawlessly. I have been a runner at meetings, collected tickets, escorted a Hall of Famer to the right place in the right hall of the convention center, stapled, greeted, stuffed packets, handed out T-shirts, folded towels and wiped floors. When the lights go up, volunteers step back and let others shine.

## 3. WHAT IS ON YOUR PROFESSIONAL BUCKET LIST?

Being president of the NATA is the ultimate bucket-list item for my athletic training life. Being in the position to represent the NATA membership is the highest professional responsibility I can imagine. The NATA president has a seat at many tables, including the Athletic Training Strategic Alliance, and has the obligation to bring the united voice of the members of NATA to the forefront, to epitomize all athletic trainers, in all settings. We are 45,000-strong and are a force with which to be reckoned. Athletic trainers all have the same entry-level health care

provider skills, and each decides if they choose a career that may have additional setting-specific set of skills, but at the core, we are all the same. Our foundational training is identical, regardless of where we practice. I want us to come together to promote our strong background and be that powerful voice to advocate for all ATs. As president, I will also challenge us to rise up to the levels of our training and credentialing and all practice at our highest abilities. We can make huge strides with strong leadership, which is why being our 15th president is on my professional bucket list.

#### **4. WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO IN YOUR FREE TIME?**

I love to travel, read, workout and, of course, volunteer with NATA. My husband and I travel a lot, as our family is on the West Coast and in New England. Working out has major perks as it relieves tension and makes one feel great. There is a 50,000-seat football stadium steps from my office, so that is where I work out several times a week. Since I read fast, I tend to be asked to edit work a lot. On the NATA Board of Directors, we typically have hundreds of pages to read and process each month. In addition, very large (several hundred pages) documents and all NATA position statements come through the board. Members would be surprised at the volume of reports, requests and documents that pass through the board, and all of us feel the strong obligation to do our due diligence and be very well prepared ahead of the monthly calls. I am reading a NATA-related document nearly daily because we serve in the best interest of all the members, not just our district. Our decisions must be mindful, purposeful and follow our mission. It is a blessing that I like to read so much.

#### **5. HOW DO YOU UNWIND AND RECHARGE AFTER A LONG DAY?**

The typical way I unwind and recharge is with any of the following: hang out with my husband, Sean; enjoy the company of our friends and good wine; catch up with family and old friends on the phone; and/or read a good mystery novel. My absolute favorite is evenings with Sean. He is an amazing cook, and we really enjoy making dinner together. We also have a terrific and diverse group of fantastic, brilliant and funny friends. We meet with them for wine, conversation, food and/or gatherings with no real purpose other than to celebrate our

friendships. My friends are all over the U.S. due to my living and working in various regions over my career. Friends and family are very important to me, and staying in touch via phone to hear what is new in their lives is essential. Reading is a relaxing pastime of mine, and I typically read novels daily for a few minutes over lunch and at night. Making time to recharge is very important in life, and I make it a priority of mine.

#### **6. TELL US A SURPRISING FACT ABOUT YOURSELF THAT NOT MANY PEOPLE KNOW.**

I signed a contract to play men's professional soccer. I was the AT for the men's professional soccer team in Chicago, and we were on a long multi-city road trip one winter during the indoor season. I had sent players home along the trip for surgery, and the referee at one of our games said we were short one player who has to be dressed in uniform and on the bench, or we would forfeit the game. We had no one else but me, so I signed a contract, donned a uniform and was on the roster. I typically wore a track suit and soccer shoes for games, so it was just a matter of a uniform instead of a polo.

#### **7. WHAT ITEM CAN'T YOU LIVE WITHOUT IN THE WORKPLACE?**

I can't live without good listening skills. Mindful listening drives decisions, makes changes, assists diagnoses and directs treatment. People can tell when you are listening or not. If on a call, they know when you are typing on a computer or not paying attention to them. People know if they are important to you by your actions, inaction, body language or attentiveness, as the individual in front of you should be the most important person at the moment. On the field or court, the patient you are treating has your undivided attention: you look them in the eye, your focus complete. In the workplace, it should be no different. I believe in making the person in my office the center of my attention. That student waited for their turn to see me, and nothing else is more important than what is on their mind. Sometimes, you are the only positive thing for that individual, the only one who is actually paying attention/listening to them. Sometimes great ideas, discoveries and substantive change can come from mindful listening. Good listening skills enable people to be more kind,

and I can't imagine an effective workplace, let alone life, without this trait.

#### **8. YOU HAVE YOUR WALLET, PHONE AND KEYS – WHAT'S ONE OTHER THING YOU CAN'T LEAVE YOUR HOUSE WITHOUT?**

I can't leave my house without my positive attitude because I just love doing what I do and can't wait to get going and get to work. I use time in the car to be grateful for everything: the challenges, the small rewards, the crazy, madness, manic, funny times and the fantastic people with whom I work. I am so grateful to have the opportunities I do, to get to work with amazing people and dedicated students. One can find gratitude or irritation in almost every moment, so why choose something that is energy draining? Having a positive attitude is critical because the focus is on something encouraging, and we all have so very much for which to be grateful. If you are reading this, you are either a member of NATA, or know someone who is a member, which means you likely are an AT or (lucky you) have access to one. Do you think about how fortunate you are to have health care at your fingertips, to know what to do and when? Every day, someone is grateful for you. Be that person.

#### **9. DESCRIBE THAT "AH-HA" MOMENT WHEN YOU KNEW YOU WERE MEANT TO BE AN AT.**

During the final championship game, one of my indoor soccer players was elbowed in the face while facing away from me, so I didn't see where he was hit and he couldn't explain it well. He wasn't concussed, but something was off. I removed him from the game and sent him to the locker room behind the bench as the game was nearly over. The next play was a foul where we were allowed a single player to shoot on goal, if he missed, the game would be live and all players would jump back in the game; if he scored, we would be up one goal with minutes left. My coach argued aggressively to allow my player to return to take the shoot out, and I refused. The athlete ended up with an unstable orbital blowout fracture, and we were told the pressure of the shootout would have likely pushed the fragments into his eyeball and would likely cause him to lose sight in that eye. We lost the game, and I have no championship ring, but that athlete played again the next season. Because I am an AT, I can protect my patient. §