

## *Marie Corridon Mortell*



**I**t is only fitting that **Marie Mortell** be honored by the Norwalk Old Timers during an Olympic year.

That's because 48 years ago, in another Olympic year, an 18-year-old Norwalk swimmer named Marie Corridon brought home the city's first and still only gold medal ever won.

Marie Corridon Mortell, now 66 and living in Southbury, still looks back with pride to that day she helped the United States' women's 400-meter freestyle relay team capture the gold medal at the 1948 Summer Olympics in London.

In fact, Mortell swam the leadoff leg for the American team, which not only beat the favored Danish and Dutch teams to win the gold, but also set a new Olympic and world record with a time of 4:29:02.

Born in Washington, D.C., but raised in East Norwalk, Mortell attended St. Joseph's School in Norwalk, and then commuted to Sacred Heart Academy in Stamford and Marymount College in New York.

Exposed to swimming at an early age, Mortell was just seven when she won her first meet at Longshore Country Club in Westport. Seeing potential, her father had her join the Women's Swimming Association in New York to get more training.

It paid off, too. By the time Mortell was 12 she won her first major title as she captured the 100 free at the Senior Metropolitan Championships in New York. From there, her career really took off as she began to tour the country competing in AAU meets.

Her big break, however, came in 1948 when she won the national championship in the 100 free in Daytona, FL. In the process, she became the first woman swimmer in history to break the one-minute barrier with her winning time of 59.9 seconds.

More importantly, however, the title earned Mortell an invite to the U.S. Olympic trials in Detroit. She finished second there to qualify in both the individual event and as a member of the relay team. As a result, Mortell also competed in the 100 freestyle at the '48 games, although an upper arm injury suffered shortly before the Olympics hampered Mortell's performance and she was eventually eliminated in the semi-finals.

The relay team, however, was a different story as Mortell joined Ann Curtis, Brenda Halser, and Jackie Lavine to win the gold in record time.

Even after those days as a competitive swimmer, Mortell has managed to stay close to the sport she loves so much. Now a mother of seven and grandmother of two, all five of Mortell's daughters were standout swimmers and each of them received swimming scholarships to Division I colleges. Four of the five even swam for veteran coach Betty Philcox who, ironically, also coached their mom.

In addition, Mortell still manages to swim every day and teaches the sport on a youth level in town.