Rensselaer Math Professor Wins Gold Medal in Diving Competition

Rensselaer math professor Margaret Cheney has a love for many things. Beyond her passion in her professional life for inverse problems in acoustics and electromagnetics, she loves her healthy lifestyle. Cheney's prescription for life includes a daily mile walk from home to the Rensselaer campus for work, as well as in-line skating, tennis, and jogging, among other things. Most of all Cheney loves springboard diving – and she recently won the gold medal in the 3-meter competition held for the 50-54 age group during the FINA Masters World Diving Championship held in Stanford, Calif., last month.

“When I do a good dive, I get a wonderful feeling of being in control in the air,” said Cheney. “Diving makes my body feel good. When I’m diving regularly, my body feels strong and supple. For some reason other sports don’t have the same effect. Also, diving is good for me mentally, as it gives me something to focus on other than work.”

Cheney took her first diving lesson at age 14, and participated in the sport competitively for several years while in high school and college. She pursued her undergraduate studies at Oberlin College in Ohio, and was the school’s first female diver.

Although Cheney has drifted in and out of the sport throughout the years since college, she continues to find ways to keep herself active in diving. She currently trains with an age-group team called “Flip and Rip” at Rensselaer’s Robison Pool. Cheney practices diving three or four times a week for up to two hours.

“Margaret Cheney is a lot of fun to watch. She’s my inspiration,” said Maria Coomaraswamy, Rensselaer’s men’s and women’s diving coach. “You can never tell her age when she’s in the air. She combines her passion for the sport with the grace and strength that you would find in most athletes – but she truly dives for fun.”

Cheney has been a Rensselaer faculty member for 18 years. She teaches Introduction to Differential Equations. Cheney’s research focuses on radar imaging. Most recently, she has been...
working on remote sensing problems, including ground-penetrating radar, sonar, and adaptive time-reversal methods in acoustics and electromagnetics. She holds four patents related to electrical impedance tomography. Cheney has given more than 100 lectures in countries throughout the world including in the U.S., Canada, Britain, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Italy, and Ireland. Her work has appeared in more than 90 publications. She earned her bachelor’s degree in mathematics and physics from Oberlin College, and a Ph.D. in mathematics from Indiana University.

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