

2018 NDCA Hall of Fame Inductee – Gussie Nell Davis

Davis was born in 1906 in Farmersville, Texas, and enrolled at the Texas Woman's University in 1923, where she was to become a concert pianist. She later switched her studies from music to physical education. She graduated in 1927 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, and began her professional career at Greenville High School as an instructor of physical education and pep-squad sponsor.

During her first year in Greenville, the pep-squad, known as the “Flaming Flashes,” did stunts and marching. Over the next ten years, the team's activities evolved and became more elaborate, including different drills with rhythm and dance steps to music.

After graduating from the University of Southern California in 1938 with a master's degree in science, the president of Kilgore College hired Davis to form a group that would deter football spectators from consuming alcohol during half-time breaks, and encourage an increase in the college's female population. The Kilgore College Rangerettes first performed in September 1940, and were the first all-girls dance-drill team in the United States to perform during half-time of college football games.

Alongside her work, Davis acted as a consultant, judged drill-team competitions, was a member of the National Drill Team Directors' Association and was part of the Fiesta International Board of Directors. Davis help found the American Drill Team Schools which gives instruction to drill teams across the United States. She retired in 1979 but remained the group's godmother.

Davis' work created a multi-billion-dollar industry that encompasses multiple uniform and prop companies, drill camps worldwide, specialist choreographers and travel agencies dedicated to the dance/drill team style she built upon. She chose not to marry or have children; she told Irving Daily News in 1979: “The Rangerettes is [sic] my child.”

Davis was honored with the “Gussie Nell Day” in Kilgore in 1964. It was followed up with a Texas statewide celebration in 1979. She was inducted into the Texas Women's Hall of Fame in 1989. In 2006, a former Rangerette donated \$3.5 million to help build the Gussie Nell Davis Residence Hall at Kilgore College - a testament to the legacy of young women whose lives Davis touched and helped prepare for life.