

# A Bench of Her Own

**"Mama Jean" Mitchell honors the calling and community she loves**

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**JEAN MITCHELL IN HER FIELD HOUSE OFFICE, SURROUNDED BY MEMENTOS FROM STUDENTS.**

Jean Mitchell rarely lets anyone call her that. It's Mama Jean to almost everyone who walks through her door — the first one before the pool at the UNH Field House. And it is Mama Jean that is etched into the granite bench Mitchell donated as part of the Walk of Memory near the Field House entrance. One of the first benches to honor a living Wildcat, its inscription reads, "Mama Jean and the Mitchell Family."

"No one knows who Jean Mitchell is," says Mitchell, a facilities manager who has worked at UNH for 42 years and whose office is well known to students as a refuge. "Anybody I care about calls me Mama Jean. I'll be leaving UNH soon, but I know that this bench will serve as a reminder to student-athletes of my love for them during their time at UNH."



In fact, the Walk of Memory as a whole serves the same purpose; Mitchell and Director of Athletics Marty Scarano came up with the idea. The area features a tree-lined walkway, a large boulder and a plaque dedicated to the "voices and memories" of UNH athletes and staff members who have died. Six benches installed in 2018 were given by several individuals and serve as a place for rest and reflection. A seventh bench will be installed this summer to memorialize the life of Cathy Coakley '72, '75G, former Wildcat athlete, coach and administrator.

For Mitchell, her bench is a way to give back to the place where she has a second family. The recipient of a 2007 Kidder Fund Award for promoting awareness of diversity and inclusion on campus and the 1992 Presidential Award of Excellence, Mitchell is known at UNH for her legendary support of students.

Mitchell moved to her corner office in 1992 after working in the residence halls, a job she also loved. But being the field house facility manager has become something of a calling. "Not a day goes by that a dozen kids don't stop in," Mitchell says. "I'm just fortunate that I get to be here and see them."

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