



# Celebrating 50 years of NU Trailblazers!

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## In the Air and On the Ground: Norwich Women in Engineering

Captain Alden Partridge recognized that America needed engineers to design and build the nation's infrastructure as the Industrial Revolution brought rapid change and increased urban populations. Civil engineering has been part of Norwich's curriculum since 1819 and our alumni have helped build the nation for the past two centuries. Many served as trustees of the university as well.



Bobbi (Fine) Haney '79

**Roberta "Bobbi" Haney '79** is among them. She was the first female to graduate from Norwich's four-year civil engineering program and first Civilian alumna to serve on the NU Board of Trustees. "I have always credited my success in a male-dominated field to my time at Norwich,"

Bobbi says. "I was the only woman in my engineering classes, so I had 20 brothers who really watched out for me. The experience gave me the confidence to work with men as peers."

Arriving in the Fall of 1975, Bobbi was among the first women to live on the Norwich campus. "For the most part, I felt totally accepted. The engineering professors were especially welcoming. All the students were treated the

same, regardless of whether they were Corps or Civilian. While there were occasional comments about civilian women detracting from the military atmosphere, we always felt a part of the university."

Following Norwich, Bobbi received a master's degree in civil and environmental engineering from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She graduated as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) launched the Superfund program to address hazardous waste sites. Bobbi was among a handful of women in the program at its inception. Over a 25-year career in the environmental field, she rose through numerous leadership positions within a national firm becoming a regional manager and Senior Vice President. Bobbi then joined Payette Associates, a leading architectural design firm in Boston, spending 11 years as the Chief Operating Officer, where she led all finance, legal, human resource, information technology, and other operational aspects of the firm. "My experience at Norwich prepared me and provided the skills and tools to succeed in these leadership positions," Bobbi says.

Bobbi is a lifetime member of the Partridge Society at the Two Star General level. She was a member of the NU Board of Trustees from 2009 to 2024, serving as Vice-Chair for the last three years. Following her service on the Board, she received an Honorary Doctorate Degree in Leadership from Norwich. She continues to work to ensure that civilian and Corps students feel part of the same university though their lifestyles are different. "It's the values-based education and community that transcends the two populations and sets Norwich apart from any other small, liberal arts college," Bobbi says. "It offers so much more than a basic education."



Mary Yeager Rudd '84 & M'06

An aerospace engineering pioneer, **Mary Yeager Rudd** originally enrolled at Norwich as a chemistry major. During her freshman year she noticed the classes engineering students were taking "looked way more interesting." She changed majors and graduated with a bachelor's in mechanical engineering in 1984.

Mary started her professional career at what is now Collins Aerospace as a project engineer for the turbine engine sensor product line. During her 40 years at Collins, Mary led teams in the design and system analysis for aircraft fuel quantity indicating systems, including the F-22, Boeing 767 and 747, the development of cryogenic liquid oxygen and hydrogen gauging, and the flight-critical main engine feed line depletion system for the Lockheed Martin X-33 single stage to orbit

launch vehicle. In 2006 Mary earned her MBA from Norwich and was class valedictorian. "I chose the online program at Norwich because of the defined timeline and course structure," she says. "It also fit nicely with my travel schedule at the time."

Mary became engineering manager at Collins for the design and development of five avionics systems for the Boeing 787 Dreamliner. Her diverse team included mechanical, electrical, software and systems engineers located in Vermont, Seattle, WA and India. This program was one of the largest and most complex executed by Collins Aerospace.

"My time at Norwich in the Corps and being the only female engineer in my class really prepared me for a career in the male-dominated field of aerospace engineering," Mary says. "My general manager observed that I never even noticed when I was the only female presenting in large meetings, which gave me the opportunity to be a mentor to our first female engineering scholarship program participant." Mary also proudly gives back to Norwich, having served on the NU Alumni Association board of directors and as a member of the Partridge Society.

Norwich University's legacy in shaping the future of civil and mechanical engineering is exemplified through the achievements of its graduates like Bobbi Fine Haney and Mary Yeager Rudd. Their pioneering roles underscore the institution's commitment to producing leaders who break barriers, drive innovation and inspire future generations of women to meet the evolving challenges of a dynamic world.

*Records documenting women's history and experience at Norwich are available through the University Archives. <https://archives.norwich.edu/>*



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