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PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANGELA GORSICA ALFORD

Elizabeth Byrd guards Gail Eppley from the Charlotte Queen Bees. Byrd's Fabulous 70s teammate Judy Barton is in the background.

GRANNY'S GOT GAME

Documentary chronicles senior women's basketball team

By ASHLEY SUAREZ-ORTIZ
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Angela Gorsica Alford was only supposed to be doing a five-minute proposal for her documentary film class. But then she met the seven basketball-playing women of the Fabulous 70s Senior Games League team in Raleigh.

"I thought I would find genetic wonders, but what I found were people who were dealing with cancer and heart disease just like everyone else," Alford said.

"The difference was that these women were fighting it together, encouraging each other. Basketball was keeping them active, independent and believing they could do anything they wanted to do."

Alford was inspired to turn her idea into a full-length documentary.

"After spending just one practice with the women and talking with them, I realized that they each had powerful stories that I wanted to share with others," Alford said.

The team, now called the Fabulous 70s, was started 19 years ago with four team members: Judy Barton, Sarah Wiggins, Mary Turner and Jo Ledford. A few years later, Shirley Pearce joined, followed by Liz Byrd and Wanda Womack.

The team plays 3-on-3 at half-court. They have made it to the national championships eight out of the nine times the biennial game has been held since the team began playing in 1994. When the players are not preparing for nationals, they participate in tournaments all over the United States.

Their once a week, two-hour practices for all those years have made them close.

"I'm one is sick we are concerned, and we do a lot of things together," Wiggins said. "We go out for lunch and things like that."



Wanda Womack, Sarah Wiggins, Jo Ledford and Judy Barton cheer on their team.

Want to help?

After "Granny's Got Game" premieres, arrangements for screenings throughout the community will be scheduled. Donations are still needed to help with the film. To make donations, subscribe to the newsletter, or for more information, visit www.grannysgotgame.com.

Inspiring women

Alford herself competed for Vanderbilt and USA Basketball in the 1990s, and won a gold medal in 1994 and a bronze medal in 1995 at the R. Williams Jones Cup in Taipei, Taiwan.

She hopes the film, "Granny's Got Game," will inspire others to honor and celebrate older athletes, change the perception of the capabilities of seniors and help younger viewers appreciate today's sports opportunities. She also hopes it will emphasize the support women get from being part of a team.

"I honestly enjoy spending time with them. I

quickly learned that although the women had not had the opportunities that I had as a player, they were still serious athletes and fierce competitors," Alford said.

"But most of all, they enjoyed playing the game and being with each other. I saw myself in them, and they reminded me of why I loved basketball and made me want to continue playing myself, despite my aches and pains. I hope that their stories will inspire others to stay active doing whatever it is they love."

Alford spent more than a year with the team filming the documentary. She even traveled with them to the 2011 National Senior Games in Houston. "I did the editing, directing, producing — wearing all the different hats," Alford said. "The women got to know me and were very comfortable with me hanging out with them."

The film has several focuses. "We talk about what it was like to play in the 1950s when they were young — pre-Title IX, six-

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on-six, what their experiences were growing up," Alford said.

Telling stories

Alford started her journey to filmmaking after taking a step away from engineering to care for her children. The first step was the photography business she started in Raleigh.

"Baby's first year, milestone birthdays, that sort of thing, I did a couple of 50th wedding anniversaries for people I've never even met," Alford said. "But seeing their whole lives in photos, I was really drawn to their stories. And I wanted to learn how to get behind the camera and capture more."

That led her to documentary film school at Duke University in 2010, where she chose the Fabulous 70s as the

subject for a documentary. "I thought my glory days were over. Then I met this team," Alford said. "These women helped me remember how much I loved to play and how much I enjoyed being part of a team."

"Granny's Got Game" is in the late stages of post-production. The film is undergoing color correction and sound mixing while the composer, Fred Story, composes an original score. Alford will begin submitting "Granny's Got Game" to film festivals this fall with the hope of premiering it in early 2013.

"It's me being able to see myself in these women," she said. "And wanting to tell their story the way I would want mine to be told in 30 years. I'm trying to honor them in that way. And their stories are fantastic; they almost tell themselves."

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