

Amanda Bright, formerly an Illinois journalism teacher and adviser and now at the University of Georgia:

From my perspective, Sally Renaud has always been the heart of the IJEA. Her passion for celebrating student media is so beautifully intertwined with all that the organization does, and she set the tone that turned the IJEA into a family.

The spirit Sally imbued in the organization was encouragement — for both student journalists and advisers. This is no small thing. We all know how challenging student media can be. Sally relentlessly worked to bring positivity to the experience by honoring great work but also being shoulder-to-shoulder in the trenches with the advisers. For Sally, there was no request or task that was too small — no achievement that wasn't worth celebrating with full-throated joy. I think I can speak for many advisers and journalism programs when I say that she inspired me to keep going through the pressures and obstacles inherent in a student newsroom experience. It was her voracious cheerleading that helped me continue and innovate when things were hard.

Sally not only took care of her advisers and student journalists mentally but also physically and emotionally. She always brought snacks — and good ones. She made sure volunteers had thoughtful gifts, and that advisers had rides or “buddies” for wherever they were going. She listened when we complained, she put her arm around us when we were struggling. Sally is naturally a warm and caring person, but her empathy seemed to overflow when she took care of her scholastic journalism friends. She taught me that striving for journalistic excellence can be done with grace and love.

She simply is, and will continue to be, the person I most want to emulate in my professional and personal life. Through her absolutely tireless work supporting us all through IJEA, she taught us to multiply her impact and compassion in our own spheres of influence, and I will be forever grateful for her mentorship and friendship.

From John J. Gonczy, IJEA president and adviser, Marist High School

One of the most remarkable aspects of my journey in scholastic journalism is that virtually every individual I met along the way proved to be a really wonderful person. In Sally Renaud, I feel truly blessed to have encountered someone exceptionally wonderful.

The first time we met (and never mind how long ago that was), I knew that I was in the presence of a remarkable human being. The reason is simple. Sally truly cares, first and foremost, about people. Students, teachers, advisers, coaches, professionals, colleagues...the titles or positions don't matter to her. She is, in an exemplary manner, all about people. For all her intelligence, experience and talent, she is one of the most selfless individuals I have ever known. Her numerous contributions to scholastic journalism in our state helped elevate us to a greater and much stronger position, but her real legacy is the kindness she brought to every single person and every single project with which she involved herself.

I owe a great deal of my success with my students to Sally. Her mentorship and friendship helped me to become a better educator and her example will always inspire me to strive to become a better person. It is with eternal gratitude that I wish her every happiness as she begins her well-deserved retirement.

From Carol Smith, IJEA board member and retired adviser

Dr. Sally Renaud has epitomized all that is right and good in scholastic journalism. Along with her depth of knowledge and the experience gained as a teacher and adviser, Sally also used her other gifts to impact those she worked with, especially as the IJEA executive director.

Using her strong people skills, Sally brought out the best in both students and other journalism professionals. I met Sally at the first IHSA state tournament contest. That was the first time I had stepped off of my small high school journalism island. Sally was there with doughnuts, welcoming the advisers, both experienced and newbies. She saw this as an opportunity to introduce the advisers who were not members of IJEA to those who were. She encouraged us all to become involved and stressed nominating our outstanding staff members for the IJEA All State Team.

When one of my students who was planning to attend Eastern expressed an interest in journalism as a major, Sally met him and helped prepare him for his freshman year. My student earned a place on the all state team his senior year and even received a scholarship. She kept in contact with me as a new IJEA member, making sure I felt like a part of the group. When a board position opened in my region, Sally encouraged me to fill it. From similar stories of other students and advisers, I know my experience was not unique. Sally cared about helping other people develop what she saw as their gifts, too. When I retired from teaching, Sally encouraged me to become a JEA mentor for new journalism advisers around the state and in other states. All of this was a life-changing experience.

Making people feel valued for their contributions was another of Sally's gifts. She believed in the power of positive reinforcement, whether for those rewriting the IJEA constitution or for those winning coveted positions like Journalism Adviser of the Year. She drove miles to present many of those awards to the advisers at their schools.

Sally also used her organizational skills to help groups run smoothly. She worked closely with the IHSA in hosting the state journalism contest finals. In addition to helping with designating rooms, getting necessary equipment, obtaining judges, etc., she arranged a breakfast for all advisers who were present and used that as a time to present special awards, giving all a chance to hear winners share their stories.

Sally has the knack for helping guide people in filling the responsibilities of their positions. She aided them in the planning the yearly fall institutes at the U of I. She worked closely with those in charge when Illinois' hosted the national JEA convention in Chicago. She also helped the two chairs of the IJEA committee responsible for Illinois' becoming one of 14 states to pass the Speech Rights of Student Journalists Act.

Flashing her heartwarming smile, Sally shared her special gifts generously, and she also usually shared snacks both at meetings and for the road trips home. We were and still are blessed by the contributions Sally made to journalism in Illinois. She deserved to be named a 2018 NSPA Pioneer Award winner.

Brad Bennewitz, IJEA board member and adviser, Galesburg High School

Sally has been a vigilant crusader for scholastic journalism. Her enthusiastic support for both advisers and student journalists stands out among her years of dedication to the field.

Many times at our IJEA board meetings, Sally would share stories about high school teachers around the state whom she had supported after they reached out for help amid rough waters. She regularly provided a steady, calming, and strong voice of reassurance for advisers in need. She knew when to get IJEA directly involved in difficult situations and when to simply provide guidance. Sally has firmly advocated the philosophy that no adviser should ever feel that he or she was "on an island," relentlessly promoting that IJEA and its statewide team of colleagues were ready and able to provide support.

More than anything, Sally loves to celebrate the work that people are doing in the field of Journalism. For Sally, as the saying goes, it's all about the kids. She wants to honor their work. She wants to reward students for their good products -- their stories, their photographs, their layouts. Sally never wants anyone to feel that they are not appreciated for their efforts, whether it's with a trophy, a plaque, or even an 'honorable mention' certificate. The same is true for advisers. I remember frequent conversations where she would ask the IJEA board for ideas to provide advisers with fun gifts at workshops and competitions. I can still hear her say, "It's all about the swag," as if she were standing right next to me. Even at our IJEA board meetings, Sally frequently had a goodie bag full of snacks and other fun tokens because she wanted to make our (sometimes) long drives home a little easier.

As we celebrate Sally, I have to credit her (and longtime retired adviser Susan Hathaway Tantillo) for getting me involved with IJEA. When Susan introduced me to Sally at the national convention in St. Louis, Sally was so enthusiastic and happy to meet me and welcome me as a journalism adviser that I found myself unable to say "no" when she suggested I should get more involved with IJEA. Who wouldn't want to be around someone like Sally Renaud who has so much love and passion for the journalism profession and for the teachers and students who are creating it.