

Thank you. Stan has been a good friend of mine for many years, so he knows a lot about me and he's seen me at my best and my worst. Lucky for me, he just shared the good stuff.

Seriously, many people, like Stan, have helped me become a good teacher, a good colleague and a good person. Some of you are here, some are far away, and some are already in heaven. All of us have special people who have supported us on our life-journeys and professional journeys. Would you just take ten seconds, along with me, to think of the people who have helped you become who you are: Those who have cared about you and wanted what was best for you in life, those who were your mentors, personally and professionally.

Who are the people you would like to thank? Ten seconds of silence. I'll watch the time.....

Everything I learned about good teaching and advising through my teaching career has been reinforced by the work of the Mentoring Program. And I believe part of the reason I was selected for the Towley Award was my work in the Mentor Program which started that day in 2007 when we drew up plans for the program in a **bar** in Denver. It's true. But it was the only place we could meet that day.

Carl Towley, JEA's first executive secretary, was NOT at the meeting, BUT he would have been pleased that JEA has created such an important and powerful support system for new advisers. According to JEA's Golden Anniversary record, Carl Towley was "dedicated, not only to teaching journalism, but also to the betterment of teaching techniques and conditions." That's right: he was thinking of us and our work as advisers. When I started teaching, I had no one to help me, no one to turn to, no one to ask for advice.

The bell rang, the doors closed, and I was on my own. Sink or swim. That wasn't right. And I bet some of you have had a similar experience. That's why we created the mentor program, so new advisers don't have to find their own way, which for the longest time was how most journalism teachers learned their trade.

I hope you remember that adjusting to the reality of a high school classroom may be one of the most challenging transitions beginning teachers face. The JEA Mentoring Program helps new advisers make a successful transition into journalism teaching by relying on the expertise and experience of veterans with a real-world experience.

Helping them is important because we know that publication programs thrive when they have a knowledgeable, supportive adviser who helps students develop a culture of responsible journalism within the school community. Alissa here really relied on her mentor.

The JEA Mentor Program provides thorough and individualized support for those new advisers. Mentors sign an agreement with the mentee and principal to help solidify a team approach.

They report on their work and their mentees' progress and situations, contributing data to our longitudinal study of the effects and success of the Mentor Program. You can see the range here, from staff issues to technology all the way down to student expression and censorship; there are plenty of issues for these new journalism teachers to face.

Because of the Mentor Program, our data shows that new journalism teachers who are mentored remain in classrooms longer than teachers who are simply left to “sink or swim.” Bridget here would have left her job had it not been for her mentor.

We know that these mentored teachers are stepping into leadership roles at the state and national levels more quickly than in past generations. And there are more than just these on the slide.

We know that their students are developing good journalism skills, and their publications are winning awards for their fine work.

We know that our veteran teachers who serve as mentors are experiencing professional revitalization, less isolation, and greater recognition. They know and believe that they are making a difference. Mentors who are here today would you please stand?

I believe that each of us sitting here today has helped other journalism teachers, whether at a convention, on the listserv, at a workshop, through an email, or by listening and giving advice. Each of us in our own way is an informal mentor to others. We learn from each other, we share with each other and we grow with each other. This is what JEA is all about.

Kelly Furnas has acknowledged the power of mentoring. He said, “I imagine all veteran journalists can look back on their careers and pinpoint someone who provided sage advice, or words of encouragement, or a sympathetic ear, and note that such a moment had a profound impact on their success. The fact that we have the ability to institutionalize those interactions is a significant point of pride for our organization.”

The Mentor Program is proud to offer so much more than informal mentoring. The retired advisers who are recruited to become JEA mentors are at the top of their profession. They are expected to do more than just answer a question or give advice or share resources. We train them to be professional mentors and provide them with the tools they need to do their jobs.

We’ve learned how important it is that our mentors receive regular professional development at all-day pre-convention workshops. At convention they continue to contribute to the profession by presenting sessions, moderating and judging events, and critiquing publications.

When they return home, they use their experience and expertise to tailor their mentoring to the needs of each mentee. And at home, they can continue to improve their mentoring skills by participating in webinars created specifically for them. Many of us experienced informal mentoring -- the teacher across the hall who checked on us to see how we were doing or the adviser in another school who provided a lesson plan. That can be helpful, but that’s not enough. Let me share some examples of what JEA mentors do:

Mentors act as a resource. Guaranteeing students’ First Amendment rights is important for mentors and is included as part of the contract I mentioned. Many mentors provide each principal with a copy of “The Principal’s Guide to Scholastic Journalism.” Over the course of a year they may also provide mentees with material they pick up at conventions, publications from the JEA bookstore, copies of

articles from C:JET, sample textbooks, lesson plans and presentations-- You name it! Whatever our mentees need, we find for them.

Mentors are problem-solvers. Sheila Jones has a mentee in an IB school who was concerned about registering enough students to get the journalism class on the master schedule. Sheila approached the problem with her from a different point of view: Instead of asking why students didn't want to take journalism, she challenged her mentee to focus on why all students should take it. She gave her copies of the study, "Journalism Matters," and they discussed marketing strategies to implement immediately. Their plan saved the journalism class...and she even had a waiting list.

Mentors are advocates. In North Carolina, Kay Windsor acts as an advocate for her mentee as well as all the other journalism teachers in her district. Kay visited the new program manager for her mentee's school system. Kay said, "Without the training and designation as a JEA mentor, I would not have ... been given an audience with the program manager since I am not a teacher or administrator or parent within the school system." By working with this manager to provide support, encouragement, training and resources, Kay acts as an advocate for the journalism teachers in the entire school system, knowing that a strong network will help her mentee as well as all the other journalism teachers.

Mentors are facilitators. By asking the just the right questions, mentors help teachers think deeply about the choices they're making. Oregon mentor Bill Flechtner told me about a mentee of his that was so concerned about how the program was progressing that every bump in the journey became a larger problem. Finally one issue brought the mentee to the brink and they had a long discussion about whether this was "the hill she wanted to die on." By asking the right questions, Bill got the mentee to the point where she was able to relax and enjoy working with students again.

Mentors are collaborators. Joy Lessard has acted as a collaborator with her mentees on several projects. Just recently she worked with one of them to come up with a realistic calendar for the staff to use as a guideline to produce their very first edition.

Mentors are learners. Sometimes they learn from their mentees and often at workshops and conventions. That's why we provide ongoing training for mentors at each convention. Sometimes, like Patty Turley, we take classes just so we can be better informed and able to help a mentee with specific needs.

Mentors are assessors. A mentor does not evaluate the new teacher, nor does the mentor report to the administrator about the mentee. A mentor can, however, help a mentee and staff by assessing their progress. For students this may take the form of a critique of the publication. For mentees, it happens during regular discussions using the Log tool to review progress and set goals.

Mentors are trusted listeners. Jo Zimmerman spent time recently with one of her new mentees, basically taking the time to listen to what he had to say. She shared with me his email follow-up: "Thank you SO much for taking the time to meet with me yesterday. You are an absolute lifesaver and you totally made my day. I'm so pleased to have someone who 'gets it' to talk with."

Obviously, mentors are teachers. They may teach their mentees, drawing on everything mentors have learned about best practices. But mentors may also sit down and work with students, like Gary Lindsay is doing here.

Finally, the most important role of the journalism mentor is that of change agent. Mentors take on the responsibility of helping teachers move their practice forward. Mentors are not just buddies or guides along the side — they are sometimes teachers, sometimes problem-solvers, sometimes collaborators, and ALWAYS good listeners. And we also know from numerous studies that mentors are the single most important component of teacher induction programs.

You probably know many of the mentors, especially if they work in your state. They are the heart of the Mentor Program and the reason why the program works. Just as you are the reason JEA works.

I've learned that there's something special about this organization... and it's the people. You are all talented, and you have extraordinary hearts. The JEA members I have known over the years truly care about helping others; they support one another. JEA is an organization with heart. And that's why it pioneered the Mentor Program.

Thank you to those at JEA who selected me for this honor today, and I thank each of you for what you bring to the profession, for what you do for others, for your service. Thank you.