

Jerseyville's Vicki Watkins Leaves Legacy: She Is Inducted Into Illinois Drill Team Association Hall Of Fame

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JERSEYVILLE - Vicki Watkins has left a legacy for drill team and dance in Jersey County, and recently, she was inducted into the Illinois Drill Team Association Hall of Fame at a ceremony in Springfield.



Watkins' induction was done at the February 11, 2023, IDTA State Finals at the Bank Of Springfield Center.

IDTA HOF Inductees are nominated and voted upon by the IDTA Officers and Board of Directors. Alex Foster of Jerseyville, IDTA Certified Execution Judge and 2020 IDTA Hall Of Fame Inductee, introduced and presented the honor to Vicki Watkins, Certified IDTA General Effect and Legality/Penalty Judge.

Vicki has been involved in IDTA for over 37 years, having served as the JCHS Dance Team Coach from 1986-1999, and for five IDTA State Championship JCHS Dance Teams from 1991-1998.

Vicki said she was "deeply humbled" by her induction into the IDTA Hall Of Fame.

"I cannot fully explain how meaningful it is to me to be included in this group of exceptional dance colleagues for whom I have immeasurable respect and admiration. My heart is full of gratitude. Thank you so much to the Illinois Dream Team Association for the honor. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to Alex Foster (my brother from another mother), my husband Steve, who has supported my passion for all things dance since we met, Emily Allgood, dearest daughter, and grandchildren Emersyn and Leighton and former IDTA state champions and forever my dance family - Julia Ramsey Harrelson (a sister from another family), Amanda Cory Koenig, Amber Elizabeth, Brianne Zimmerman, Jamie Jones, Kristina Frank Woosley (mother of Kenli Graham who became an IDTA State Champion), and Lisa Warner for being there to celebrate with me. I love you all!"

These are some of Alex's words when Vicki was inducted: "This year's inductee served as an IDTA coach from 1986 through 1999. Under her tutelage, her teams were awarded five IDTA state championships, of which four were consecutive from 1995 through 1998.

After retiring from coaching, she continued to serve as an IDTA General Effect judge, treasurer, regional rep, officer, and committee member. She continues to serve IDTA 37 years later, still on the competition floor with all of you while wearing her enthusiastic smile and contagious positive attitude as both a General Effect and Legality judge.

"In addition to her team, she has led IDTA through her dedication by contributing to judging seminars and the board of directors in both prosperous and lean years. She has shared this experience while representing IDTA as one of our country's premiere state tournaments as a judge and official for IHSA and other state dance organizations."

Alex continued and said Vicki has inspired dancers, coaches, adjudicators, and board members to provide a tournament for dancers/athletes and scholars.

"Capitalizing upon her love of classical dance and musical theatre, her approach to her artistry involved experimentation and 'playtime' including all team members in choreography sessions which fostered ownership in the productions presented as well as the team program as a whole.

"As a judge, she enabled growth to a larger sphere of influence by providing constructive criticism with joy and enthusiasm and demonstrating rudiments and techniques for competitors to correct and improve both their team's presentations and programs as a whole. She has mentored countless coaches and judges in addition to the hundreds of athletes she coached."

Other key accomplishments under Vicki were the following:

"Lay All 'Your Love On Me!" 1991 IDTA AA Prop State Champions

"The Phantom Of The Opera" 1995 IDTA AA Prop State Champions

"Miss Saigon" 1996 IDTA AA Prop State Champions

"Kiss Of The Spider Woman" 1997 IDTA AA Prop State Champions

Yanni's "Deliverance!" 1998 IDTA AA Prop State Champions

Vicki also judges for the Missouri Dance Team Association and is an Illinois High School Association (IHSA) Dance Official.

Vicki is a retired Jersey Community High School Special Education Teacher.

2023 marks the 25-year anniversary of the 1998 JCHS State Championship Dance Team. Several 1998 team members and many other team members of Coach Watkins were present to see their coach inducted into the Hall of Fame. The following are the four-time State Champions beginning with their freshmen year in 1995 through their senior year in 1998: Lisa Foiles Warner, Tara Hagen Beauchamp, Cindy Heitzig Nowak, Sara Talley Pranger, and Brianne Zimmerman.

Coach Watkins led five teams to state championships in 1991, 1995, 1996, 1997, and 1998. She was the first coach to bring home a state champion to JCHS and is the most decorated JCHS coach.

Vicki Watkins Biography

Watkins, Vicki (Certified General Effect, Legality Judge) Vicki began formal dance training as a young child and has continued to take classes in a wide genre of dance ever since. She previously danced with the Gainesville (Florida) Civic Ballet company and with the University Dance Theater at Illinois State University. Vicki has choreographed musicals at the high school and college levels.

For many years, she was the coach of Jersey Community High School Dance Teams who earned five IDTA State Championships under her tutelage. Vicki also served as the treasurer for IDTA for several years during that time period. Since then, she has been a judge for various dance organizations. Vicki is a certified IHSA Dance Official (regional, sectional, and several state championship series), an IDTA Legalities and General Effect judge, and a guest judge for the Missouri Dance Team Association State Finals.

Having retired after 40 years in education, Vicki resides in Jerseyville with her husband Steve. Together, they have six children and 11 grandchildren with one on the way. She spends her spare time being a supportive “Dance Grandma” to her youngest granddaughter and grandson. Vicki is honored to be a part of the Illinois Drill Team Association State Championship and wishes all participants the performance of a lifetime.

History Of IDTA

Before Illinois had a formal organization for dance/drill teams and coaches, there were some clinics and contests that were being hosted throughout the state. These functions were usually sponsored by outside organizations. In 1977 after hosting five annual contests, Pat Lester organized a group of drill team directors to formulate and propose a state contest series for drill/pom teams to the Illinois High School Association (IHSA). The proposal committee believed that Illinois needed to unify the contests in the state. Pat Lester, Steve Oracko, and Kathy Swan presented the proposal to the IHSA in the spring of 1977.

The answer from the IHSA was positive, but no action was taken. Two years later, Pat Lester and a new committee presented a second proposal in the spring of 1979 to the IHSA after a state-wide survey showed there was strong support for a state contest series. This proposal was rejected by the IHSA; however, the board gave the committee “its blessing” to begin an organization to serve the coaches and teams of Illinois. Thus, the Illinois Drill Team Association was organized to create an association that could encourage interest in poms, dance, drill, and tall flag activities in Illinois schools.

The organizational structure was designed, competition rules were formulated, and membership was offered. The founding officers were Kathy Swan, president; Pat Leaf, contest director; and Pat Lester, judging coordinator. The first state contest was held at Oak Park-River Forest High School on March 15, 1980.

Since those first years, IDTA has grown in many ways. The organization has a charter with the State of Illinois and is a legal non-profit organization. The executive board includes representatives from 12 regions across the state, six officers, and five board of director members. The association has expanded the programs to include special events such as Start the Beat (a competition for soloists, duets, trios, and small groups), Jump Start (a summer camp program for teams), Rising Star Awards, Student Academic Scholarships, and recognition of our Scholar-Athletes. All programs are open to members of dance and flag teams.

Membership includes approximately 140 dance and flag teams representing Junior High, Junior Varsity, and Varsity programs from over 115 schools. Total student participation in IDTA activities is well over 1,600 members. IDTA is still expanding its programs and will continue to grow.

Foster said from the core of Watkins' being, she is a dancer/educator/coach/mentor, and advocate.

"While she was undeniably the consummate competitor as a coach, she taught her coaching staff and team to be inclusive of all abilities as to prevent exclusivity and entitlement," he said. "This advocacy came from her 40 years as a special education teacher at Jersey Community High School. As one of her former dancers, Lisa Foiles Warner, stated, "The older I get the more and more I realize and appreciate all that she gave to us each year. She went above and beyond. She told me after I first made the team my freshman year, with basically no dance experience, that she saw potential in me.

"By that decision and her direction of making us more than "just poms," I learned so much that allowed me to continue on after high school. If not for her drive and persistence to make us better each year, I wouldn't have enrolled in dance classes and eventually become a dance teacher and choreographer for our community theater."

"Not only as a coach, but in all of her endeavors, our inductee taught her students, team members, and all of us respect and perseverance while she simultaneously filled our toolboxes with the tools to accomplish our goals whether on the dance floor, in the classroom and throughout all of life's challenges."

Foster closed and said: "I am so immensely proud as both a member of this fine organization and a direct benefactor of her contributions as my first dance teacher and mentor to introduce you to our 2023 IDTA Hall of Fame Inductee, Vicki Watkins."

Here are some key facts about Vicki Watkins:

Coach of the JCHS Panther Poms 1986-1999

State Championship Teams included 1991, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998

She continues to judge for IHSA, IDTA, and Missouri Dance Team Associations