

# H-F teacher Janine Stroemer helped many find their voice

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Homewood-Flossmoor High School teacher Janine Stroemer helped hundreds of students find their voice.

Stroemer, who retired in June after 19 years at H-F, organized speech teams around the slogan "Stand and Deliver." Under her tutelage, H-F had six individual champions, 29 state finalists and 297 students who competed at IHSA speech tournaments. Twice she directed state champions in group interpretation.

A member of the English faculty, Stroemer helped the English department reinstitute a speech class so that students would learn how best to present materials in front of others. She often found students from that class who proved to be excellent candidates for H-F's competitive speech teams presenting everything from poetry reading and oratorical declamation to extemporaneous speaking and original comedy in regional, sectional and state competitions.

Group interpretation was a special event for Stroemer. She would develop strong teams of about a dozen students willing to put in weeks of after-school

work practicing most January and February evenings until 8 or 9 o'clock. Stroemer helped prepare students for their individual competitions as well as group interpretation. She would work with all comers – novice or experienced – and find just the right spot for them.

After throwing out topics for student feedback, she would write the script for group interpretation.

"By having adaptations or compilations, there's a lot more flexibility. I use fiction, nonfiction, news, movies, whatever I can find, mix them all together and 'Voila!'" she said.

As the pieces would be rehearsed, Stroemer often would refine them. Even after taking a cast to sectionals competition, she'd still find some need to make a change for a stronger H-F performance.



Janine Stroemer

Stroemer says it was part of her "artistic bent" to write the scripts. They gave her "the opportunity to enhance the skills and adjust for the skills of your students. So, the powerful students you're writing things that are challenging and for those who are new you're writing things that are going to build their skill set, but you don't have to write it beyond their skill set."

In 2018 Stroemer wrote "A Head Full of Dreams: The Life of John Merrick" based on the story of the man who became known as the Elephant Man. H-F brought home the state championship trophy. "We just happened to have the four really strong actors we knew could carry the roles and we wrote it around them," she recalled.

The 2021 team, performing under COVID-19 restrictions, took second place for a performance of a Greek tragedy, and eight of the 11 cast members were named by IHSA judges to the All-State Cast.

Stroemer was nominated by the IHSA for the National Coaches Award, and this year she'll receive her third Diamond Award from the National Speech & Debate Association's Honor Society

that reflects Stroemer's excellence and long career in the field.

Many of Stroemer's former students took what they learned from her into varied careers around the world.

"The majority of students I remain in contact with are pretty successful," she said. Some are appearing on TV series or on the stage. Stroemer says the others "will say something about how being in speech and the family of Group Inter has really given them experiences that they carry with them," she said. "That's the most rewarding part. For me, I think I measure my success by their ability to be happy and productive in what they do."

Teaching was a fallback career for Stroemer after an acting career sputtered. Still, she has no regrets. She's been in a classroom at Prairie State College for 24 years and will continue teaching an introductory speech class there. She laughs that in the future she'll find "my next big thing."

"It's been a good year to go out, just to feel appreciated and feeling satisfied in what I've been able to accomplish," she said. But even more so, she's "so satisfied by what my students have been able to go on to do."



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