

‘A True Passion for Iowa State’

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By Carole Gieseke

Julie Larson has tiny feet, but she has very big shoes to fill.

After working for the ISU Alumni Association for 34 years, Larson (L)(MS '84 higher ed) is retiring in July 2018.

No more Big 12 spirit rallies. No more 50-year class reunions. No more board meetings, Senior Week, fundraising visits, Honors & Awards ceremonies, or Cyclone Centrals. No more early-morning-workouts-and-grabbing-a-Starbucks before 8 a.m. management team meetings. It's time for a well-deserved break.

With 34 years of service to the Alumni Association – plus additional years on campus with the YMCA and Financial Aid Office – it would be easy to focus on Larson's longevity, but her lasting legacy is much more about quality than quantity.

She started out as an adviser to the Student Alumni Association (now Student Alumni Leadership Council) on March 22, 1984.

“Truly, working with students is why I came to the Alumni Association,” she says. “That was a true joy.”

Under Larson's leadership, the SAA program quickly became a standout among student alumni programs nationally. And it was during those years that she left an imprint on students' lives – and created lifelong relationships.

Cyndi (Murray) Bonus (L)('85 consumer food science, MEd '92) first met Larson when she interviewed for a position on Senior Class Council. Larson was a new staff member at that time, but she impressed Bonus with her ability to work with each individual student's personality and work style.

When Bonus decided to return to Iowa State to earn a master's in education, Larson served as her mentor – and, coming full circle, Bonus became Larson's graduate assistant.

“Working side by side with her and gleaning all I could about working with the students was priceless to me,” Bonus says. “I watched her maintain close and personal contact with countless alumni.

“Julie embodies true passion for Iowa State University.”

Later, Bonus served on the Alumni Association’s Board of Directors, and her husband, Ken Bonus, is a current Board member.

Larson’s job title has changed many times over her 34 years with the organization. As director of student and career programs, she served as adviser to ISU’s Parents’ Board, worked closely with the Family of the Year program, helped create the Cyclone Alley student section for ISU basketball games, and implemented a strong alumni career resources program. As director of outreach and events, she oversaw all on- and off-campus events for the ISU Alumni Association, including alumni clubs, Young Alumni Council, reunions, special interest societies, Des Moines outreach, career resources, gala and golf fundraising events, spirit rallies and other athletics-related events, the OLLI program, and ISU retirees. She coordinated the Honors & Awards program, oversaw Alumni Days, planned receptions for Iowa community presidential visits, coordinated the Alumni Relations Council, and supervised six staff members. When the Association moved into the Alumni Center 10 years ago, Larson helped create and implement policies for the new facility.

Scott Stanzel (L) (’95 journalism & mass comm) met Julie in 1992 as a student ambassador, and as a senior he served as chair of the newly created Student Foundation Committee of SAA.

“Julie had the unique ability to simultaneously provide sound guidance and insights to students while also giving them plenty of room to make their own decisions about the mission of their SAA committees and activities,” he said. “That meant a great deal to student leaders, as it provided a true opportunity to grow and learn.”

Stanzel's family became ISU Family of the Year in 1994, and he later served on the Alumni Association's Board of Directors, ultimately serving as chair of the Board.

In her most recent position as chief of staff and director of development, Larson has had the opportunity to reconnect with former students, Board members, and other alumni as she raised endowment funds for the Association. By the time she retires on July 5, she will have helped raise about \$2 million.

"It's rewarding to think that I've contributed in a small way to help sustain the Alumni Association for the future," she says.

Jeff Johnson (L)(PhD '14), Lora and Russ Talbot Endowed President & CEO of the Association, has worked with Larson for 18 years.

"She's like a mini-alumni association," Johnson says. "She's an institution. She's had an amazing journey, from student affairs to alumni relations professional to fundraiser. Everyone she meets, she makes them feel so special, and Iowa State continues to benefit from that."

Larson, whose husband, John, recently retired from a position with ISU Facilities Planning and Management, says she'll miss working with the Alumni Association staff and alumni, but she's looking forward to the opportunity to travel and spend more time with her grandchildren.

"This was a dream job," she says. "I truly can't imagine doing anything else than what I've done. I've loved my job for 34 years. How many people can truly say that?"

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