

I Love My
Librarian!

Nominations for Sue Kowalski
Pine Grove Middle School
East Syracuse, New York

NOMINATOR
Zach Collins

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?

I believe that there are many definitive reasons why my nominee Mrs. Sue Kowalski should win this award. One reason I think that she should win the award is due to her extreme perseverance and cunning ideas to help make PGMS library #1!

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?

She has inducted me into the iStaff program, which is a collaborative group of students that work with Mrs. Kowalski and the other librarian staff. She has also helped me and many other students understand hard-work ethics, and how to really put first things first.

3. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.

I believe that she makes the school a much better place in a few ways. One way is that she devised a plan called the 'iStaff Mobile Innovation Studio,' which is a mobile station equip complete with an iPad, a projector, a computer or two, and the very smart students who would help other peers with work and/or projects. The reason that I am nominating Mrs. Kowalski is because she lost a couple of grants in the past trying to achieve the iStaff studio, so I think that this is a good opportunity to help her win the \$5000 prize so she can help with the studio.

4. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

I believe that she has impacted the learning environment in a very, very positive way. Ever since I was on the iStaff team, I felt much more organized. As for other, non-iStaff students, I believe that she has made the library itself a nice and peaceful learning environment for the students who need to finish their poetry portfolio or those who need to electronically finish that essay for ELA class. She has, also, made sure that the library is equip with the essential equipment for a 21st century learning environment, which, for me, has impacted my work ethic greatly.

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community?

She has demonstrated leadership in many of ways; locally and nationally. She has won many librarian awards including the elusive 'Electronics Doorway' award, and won the NYS best librarian award. She has also been invited locally to a very formal best-of-the-best librarians luncheon. I think these accolades alone set the standard for how a true leader demonstrates her leadership.

I Love My Librarian!

NOMINATOR

Mary & Barb Kippley & Panarites

- 1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?**

We would like to nominate Sue Kowalski for the I Love My Librarian Award as she has been recognized by several organizations for her extraordinary style of teaching, leadership, vision and application of these talents to benefit our students, district, community and beyond. Some of her most recent awards are as follows:

2012 Teacher Librarian (professional journal) Visionary Leader Award - Honors school librarians who have demonstrated leadership of the Learning Commons concept.

<http://www.esmschools.org/files/30745/teacher%20librarian%20article%20best%20of%20the%20best.pdf>

AASL 2011 National School Library Program of the Year (NSLPY) Award, which speaks for itself. As her library staff members and biggest fans, We can honestly say her leadership, promotional prowess, 21st Century thinking, “it’s all about the children” attitude, service to student, staff and administration, community involvement and a plethora of innovative ideas resulting in multiple accolades contributed to her dynamic program receiving this prestigious award for our small upstate New York school community. (See two of the many press releases on this award)

<http://ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/news/pr.cfm?id=7084>

http://ischool.syr.edu/newsroom/news.aspx?recid=1134&utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+suischoolnews+%28iSchool+News%29&utm_content=Google+Feedfetcher

Received a shout out from Brad Meltzer, renowned journalist, author and host of History Channel’s Brad Meltzer’s Decoded

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brad-meltzer/school-libraries-_b_1411914.html

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?

Sue always has an open door policy for everyone who seeks to learn not to mention just being there for a friendly chat, encouraging word, or a place to relax. Recently, she divided the library area in to “learning commons” and shared space for learning, testing, quiet reads, relaxing, etc. This method of “common areas” can accommodate several groups and individuals at one time. Students flock to her for an uplift to their day and know her care and concern for them is genuine. Teachers and administrators seek her out for research, innovation and collaborative ideas.

3. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.

Sue is definitely the “go to gal” in the building - maybe even the district. She constantly volunteers for committees and groups that will allow better communication among the ranks and is the kind of person who is reliable and always volunteers her services to enhance or make things just a little bit brighter for everyone.

4. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

Sue always has a steady flow of students coming in to chat or visit because she is always making learning and school time fun and innovative. Not only does she open her doors and resources to all teachers and their curriculum, she makes every event an adventure to enhance the learning of the students involved. She collaborates with teachers to make learning about the subject matter fun, original, and attention getting always maintaining the integrity of the facts. She has hosted many events for the different grade levels including, but not limited to a 6th grade “Mythapalooza”a day of ancient Gods and Goddesses in complete regalia (staff, teachers and students participating), feasts with foods of the times, trivia games to review the materials learned and festive music, poetry and skits to depict the times; a 7th grade author visit engaging the class level in reading one of his or her books before the presentation, then encouraging reviews of the book by the students and open forum for questions for the author after; an 8th grade 1920s party at the end of the unit where everyone dressed in 1920s garb, students presented biological sketches of the characters from the 1920s, as well as integrating the music, art and poetry of the era; and last, but certainly not least, Sue spearheaded a Community Read called Bookapalooza (for which she won a grant). These community reads and events are always a great success with students, staff, administrators, community leaders and always become a media event. Some of the events include: a Carnival (complete with dunk tank, cotton candy, etc.); a Peace Rally (which included the entire staff, district administrators, community leaders and students coming together in an Assembly); a Silent Auction to raise money for Breast Cancer (students painted plates which were auctioned off via our staff intranet); followed by a Plate Smashing where the pieces of the broken plates depicting strife and stress in the world, were used to make mosaics displayed in the library illustrating bad things can be turned into something good. In essence, Sue always

makes her mark and leaves lasting memories for the students and families and the entire community.

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community?

Here is a list of ways Sue has demonstrated leadership in both the school community and the profession:

Career Highlights for Sue Kowalski
Nominee for the "I Love My Librarian" Award

- Received AASL National School Library Program of the Year Award 2011
- Invited to speak at School Library Journal's National Leadership Summit in Washington, DC. (September 2011)
- Received Leadership Award from Onondaga County Teacher's Association for involvement in ESMUT May 2011
- Received Dewey Fellowship from NYLA SLMS(\$1000) to attend NYLA State Conference/Leadership Training October 2010
- Article published in Teacher Librarian magazine (June 2011) "Reach out, Make Connections, Thrive"; another article to be in Dec 2011 issue
- Attended NYLA/SLMS Leadership Training (July 2011) via grant from OCMBOCES School Library System
- President Elect for NYLA-SSL (School Library division of New York State Library Association) for 2012-13; President 2013-2014
- Current Region 6 rep (Utica Syracuse Oswego) for NYLA-SSL
- Pine Grove MS Ski club advisor
- Post Standard Newspaper in Education Advisory Board member since 2000 (do presentations and various volunteer activities)
- Stay connected with students via text message club, Facebook, web page, clubs, twitter, student work programs
- Coordinates many community service programs through the library to raise funds for local organizations (raised over \$700 last year and collected books and items for troops)
- Multiple integrated projects with all grade 6, 7, and 8 ELA teachers, many special areas, and

- Co-coordinated Flashmob for end of the year send off for students!
- Present workshops at regional and state events in areas of promotions, advocacy, and student leadership related to library/school culture

Pre-2010-2011 school year

- Classroom teacher from 90-01 (middle school Language Arts and Reading in Syr. City School District)

- Received LMS degree from SU in 2003
- Worked as librarian in Syracuse City School District 2001-2004; at ESM (Minoa) and (Pine Grove) 04-present
- Central NY Media Specialists group (professional organization for 5 counties); President for 2 years; VP for 2—coordinating programming and professional development for organization
- Active member/leader of national and state committees (ALA—National Library Week Grant Committee—as past winner; AASL—Promotions and Marketing Committee Chair; AASL—School Library Media Month Task Force member) Generally all committees to promote the opportunities available for librarians throughout the country within these national organizations.
- Received ALA National Library Week grant at Minoa for community read project (\$5000); promoted reading throughout the Village via 23 student designed billboards and partnership with 25 local businesses
- Received grants from CNY Teacher Center to attend professional development conferences. (NYLA (\$130), SLMS '08 (\$130)).
- Received grants from CNY Teacher Center to promote student run after school program out of library (\$500)
- Received CNYTC grant to coordinate community-wide reading event for 09-10 school year (\$750)
- Received grant from BOCES to coordinate community-wide reading event for 08-09 school year (\$300)
- Received grant from BOCES to attend SLMS Conference '09
- Received grant from Bound to Stay Bound Publishing to attend AASL National Conference in Reno, Nevada

- Received cash award from GALE Publishing at 2008 SLMS Conference for leadership and commitment to the field
- Received 4 grants via donorschoose.com to support library programming (books for guest author Tim Green, listening centers to promote audio books, signage to promote programming, and a series of fantasy books students were requesting)
- Received grant from BOCES to attend 2010 fall AASL national conference in Charlotte, NC
- Placed 3rd in a national essay contest about librarians (a tongue in cheek look at the truth behind librarians)
- Presented workshops at 6 statewide conferences (NYLA, SLMS, and NYSMSA) on topic of promoting your library, public relations, and the power of collaboration (“All Ideas for your Stake-holders”, “Cha-ching; cash in @ your library”, “Kick things up a Notch” to name a few)
- Published in Knowledge Quest May 08 (journal of American Association of School Librarians) about role of libraries in student leadership; “Passenger or Crew: Who do YOU Want in Charge?”
- Member of several school district committees (Strategic Plan Core Team, District technology committee, Ed Spec Committee for Pine Grove; ESMUT)
- Central NY Teaching Center liaison for Pine Grove
- Board of Trustee member for NOPL (Northern Onondaga Public Library) for 4 year terms
- Actively collaborate and promote the role of the library in all facets of our community via partnerships with local businesses, other schools, public libraries, parents, and school organizations
- Attend range of professional development to better her abilities with technology, literature, curriculum, and assessment
- Has coordinated several school-wide initiatives including: Bookapalooza 09 (community read event at Pine Grove); Peer training program at Minoa to promote student leadership including an evening presentation for the community; afterschool book club at Minoa (30-40 students a week stayed to participate); school-wide guest author visits (Tim Green, Ben Mikaelson, Matt McElligott, Tedd Arnold, and Full Cast Audio studios); guest author day at Minoa featuring 15 plus community “all star” readers; afterschool clubs at Pine Grove (students leading students) to promote gaming, crafts, literature, and technology; Pine Grove students went to Woodland to read to students every day for a week during lunch to celebrate Read Across America week; several

fundraiser events for Bobby Hart Scholarship, Nothing but Nets, Vera House, Ronald McDonald House, Galisano Children's Hospital and Old Newsboys Fund; multiple events for staff—receptions, open houses, appreciation days

ACRONYM GUIDE:

AASL American Association of School Librarians (National)

ALA American Library Association (National)

NYLA New York Library Association (State)

SLMS School Library Media Section (State) renamed SSL in 2011

CNYMS Central New York Media Specialists (Regional)

CNYTC Central New York Teaching Center (Regional)

I Love My Librarian!

NOMINATOR

Marcia Kelley

1. Please tell us in 2-3 sentences why your nominee should win this award. What sets him/her apart?

If it's happening at Pine Grove Middle School, Sue Kowalski is probably involved somehow. Sue should win this award because her positive attitude, boundless energy and passion for seeing students grow, learn, lead and reach their potential are evident in everything she does. It's no coincidence that her library is the heart of the building.

Sue is constantly transforming the library to adapt to our students. She doesn't expect the kids to change. Even better—she lets students get involved so they have ownership in the evolving library and its long list of activities & projects.

In Sue Kowalski I see an incredible leader and role model for both students and staff who “walks the walk” and leads by example. She is a lifelong learner and works tirelessly to stay at the forefront of her industry.

When I think of Sue, the word “Innovative” also comes to mind. She is constantly trying new ideas and ways to engage, empower and teach students.

2. How has the nominee helped you and/or students at school? For example, did the nominee help you with a project, recommend resources or collaborate with you to enhance student learning?

Giving students' power is out of the comfort zone for most educators. That's because many teachers cannot recognize the nuances between relinquishing control and empowering young minds. It is by “doing” that our students truly get the most valuable life lessons.

Sue provides a chance for students to become leaders and self-directed independent thinkers. One way she is achieving this is by implementing a new student worker

program at our middle school last year called the “iStaff.” Students are “hired” after a formal application process. They are expected to complete a list of daily tasks, manage their assigned library area and complete other projects in collaboration with the adult library staff.

Many of the more than 40 student iStaff workers provide technology support throughout the building by delivering wireless laptop carts and setting up equipment for daily and special events. They also offer instructional support/tutoring for fellow students and classes in the library. Other iStaff volunteers manage the front counter, coordinate series collections, prepare online orders for books based on student requests and serve on special teams for large-scale events like the school's annual “Bookapalooza” community read event. There’s a job for everyone and they do it before and after school as well as during free periods!

Seventh-grade teacher Sue Verbeck admits the iStaff students are “fantastic peer tutors” who assist fellow students with computer and software issues so teachers can focus on helping their students with the curriculum. The iStaff members help the teachers with technology too.

Sue developed the iStaff program to give students meaningful leadership opportunities in the areas of literature, technology, facilities, programs, and public relations. The iStaff members have become role models in the school. They are also developing the lifelong skill of being self-directed and responsible individuals. I cannot think of a better way to help students and make a lasting impact on their lives.

Peter Hager, a student iStaff member, summed it up, “I encourage others to try iStaff because it’s an easy way to learn independence and have fun doing it.”

Three students spoke about the iStaff to an audience of more than 60 school administrators and librarians from numerous school districts at their Administrator Advocate of the Year luncheon this spring. The opportunity gave the students valuable public speaking experience.

Our students are enriched by Sue’s willingness to let them roll up their sleeves and get involved. When students are empowered to lead, they have an increased sense of ownership. Empowered students use their initiative to add value and make a positive impact on the library program and the entire school community.

But Sue’s desire to develop student leaders doesn’t stop with the iStaff. Last winter, three students accompanied Sue at Library Legislative Day at the New York State Capital in Albany, NY. The mission was to let Senators and Assemblymen understand the impact of libraries on student achievement and readiness for career and college. Students presented directly to our local Senator and to the aides of two local Assemblymen. Not every activity impacts the entire student body, but for these 3 students who expressed an interest to share their passion of libraries on lobby day, it was a god fit and a memorable experience that will last a lifetime.

On behalf of our Pre-K principal, Carol Feldmeier, I share another example of how Sue Kowalski and the Pine Grove library staff have helped students and colleagues.

Our district has its own pre-k school with about 300 students. The pre-k library has no librarian. It is not automated and there is no efficient system in place to track more than 2,500 unlabeled books in the collection. Lacking an organized library, pre-k teachers find it difficult to locate books to complement classroom projects. Parent volunteers want to help but the lack of a universal system is a barrier to success.

As our district began to implement the national Common Core Standards with an emphasis on non-fiction reading, the library was growing and a need for a solution was amplified.

Sue stepped up to the plate and, with her staff, embarked on a project to computerize the pre-k library. She helped free up her own staff so they could enter the necessary data and catalog each book as well as the other details to automate the library in a robust, library management system called Destiny Quest.

Without their help, the project would most likely be uninitiated. Instead, pre-k students should be checking out books, teachers will be able to easily match books to their curriculum and parents will be able to help with clerical duties by this October.

3. How does the nominee make the school a better place? Please be specific.

Among her passions, Sue has focused on programs led BY students FOR students. Student leadership opportunities are something she truly values and promotes in her library and throughout the school.

Sue is the adviser for the Stop Bullying Now (SBN) Program/Club. She and the members develop building-wide activities and events to address the hot middle school topic of bullying. Video conference discussions with other schools/students in other states are among the strategies to bring awareness and seek remedies for this unfortunate epidemic.

Another way she is working to make the school a better place is that Sue is coordinating this year's "Choose Kind" campaign, which is a year-long approach to aligning literacy with positive choices.

Speaking to a group recently, our middle school principal shared the fact that staff & students identified "Bookapalooza" as one of their favorite school traditions. Sue started the annual community read event where students, staff, parents, family and even community members read and discuss the same book.

She has a multi-faceted approach each year hosting variety of book-related activities so participants can find something that appeals to them and thus engages them. Students want "in on the fun" and along the way, they never realize they are reading and discussing books that are carefully chosen and chock full of valuable life lessons. To

enhance the learning experience, she lets students organize and run many Bookapalooza activities and contests with varying degrees of success—a leap of faith for some educators, but just a normal day for Sue.

Trips and memorable experiences also make the school a better place. In May, led & coordinated by a student with a student committee under Sue's guidance, 40 students and teachers went to a nearby Teen Book Festival to connect teens to young adult authors and their books. A star-studded parade kicked off the event complete with local marching bands, mascots and ending as the panel of 35 authors arrived in stretch limos and classic cars. Authors and teens enjoyed red carpet treatment during a rally, a game show, local entertainment, breakout sessions, and autograph time.

Sue coordinates several after school clubs using a “students leading students” format. These clubs host several fundraiser events throughout the year and Sue makes sure to involve students in the process. Past beneficiaries of her efforts include the Ronald McDonald House (helping families stay together when children are being treated at the hospital), Galisano Children’s Hospital (helping our city build its first children’s hospital), Nothing But Nets (preventing malaria, a leading killer of children in Africa), the Bobby Hart Scholarship (in honor of a student who died), the Old Newsboys Network (buying Christmas gifts for children from low-income families) and Vera House (fighting to end domestic and sexual violence).

These activities give our staff and students an opportunity to support and give back to the greater community. They foster empathy and teach our students the power of philanthropy, which obviously makes our school a better place.

Staff receptions, open houses, appreciation days—she’s not only there, she’s probably on the planning committee as well.

Whether it is a community read or a guest author she is all too happy to help teachers tie these school-wide initiatives back to the curriculum in their own classroom. She’s always willing to help colleagues, even when their requests are not tied to one of her projects.

And it doesn’t stop with the library. Sue is the Ski Club adviser as well. The club gives students something to look forward to in the winter, gives them social opportunities and at a time when childhood obesity is making headlines, introduces them to the lifelong physical activities of skiing and snowboarding.

4. How has the library, and the nominee in particular, had an impact on students and the learning process?

Under Sue Kowalski’s leadership, Pine Grove Middle School won the 2011 National School Library Program of the Year award from the American Association of School Librarians (AASL). The honor recognizes school library programs that meet the needs of the changing school and library environment and are fully integrated into the school’s curriculum.

The award acknowledges nationally what we already knew to be true: there is no doubt that the library, with Sue at the helm, has a significant impact on students and the learning process.

Sue continually assesses what's working, what's not working throughout the library and she makes adjustments as needed to better serve the library's customers. In an article for a leading industry publication, Sue shared her philosophy, "As an instructional leader, it is my job to rally a team who will provide honest feedback about what needs to change and support its implementation. I don't think we will ever be 'done' with our transformation, because teaching and learning needs are constantly changing."

To this end, six new zones were created last year in the Pine Grove library by repurposing space as the library strives to create a learning commons environment. New mobile and presentation technologies including networked flat screen televisions were added, the library is now wireless and its nonfiction collection was rearranged.

A major shift in space usage involved redesigning the library's computer area to a flexible space. Immovable desktop computers on long tables facing an interactive white board were replaced by round tables and wireless laptops that can be used or stored as needed. The new setup maximizes the space for multipurpose use, facilitates collaboration and offers opportunities for students as teachers.

An office/kitchen area was converted to a much-needed "quiet room" for students/staff who need silence to be productive. A makeover in another cluttered office/storage area resulted in a conference room that now gets used by small groups of students and staff on a regular basis. The room is used for collaborative initiatives ranging from club meetings and department work sessions to celebrations. In another section of the library, an inviting nook was created for graphic novels after the popular section outgrew two other locations.

The common thread with all these transformations is not only change to enhance the learning experience for the students, but also involvement of these students in the decision-making process.

Another way Sue has integrated the library into the curriculum has been through the Big 6 Problem Solving process. Nationally recognized, the Big 6 has six steps that describe the thinking process a person goes through anytime there is an information problem to solve. The steps help students develop the skills and understandings they need to find, process and use information effectively. The Big 6 skills are applicable to all subject areas across the full range of grade levels so they fit naturally under the umbrella of the library.

Since introducing the process to Pine Grove Middle School staff, Sue has been at the forefront of a multi-year effort to integrate the Big 6 throughout the school. In 2011-2012 she collaborated with 26 teachers and their related support staff as part of this massive undertaking.

This year Sue is developing templates and packaged “units” that will unify and simplify the process so teachers can more easily integrate their content. She believes in the Big 6 process and is willing to go the extra mile to help staff integrate it into the program.

5. How has the individual demonstrated leadership in the school community?

Sue Kowalski was one of 17 educators from around the world to be honored in April with an inaugural “Teacher Librarian Leadership Award.” Editors of “Teacher Librarian: The Journal for School Library Professionals” selected the international honorees, who they refer to as visionaries, for leading the shift to a new role for school libraries. The journal is one of the leading publications in its field and is one of the largest independent library journals, with over 26,000 readers in the U.S., Canada and abroad.

The fact that a one of the most prominent journals in the industry recognizes Sue’s leadership skills is significant, but not a surprise.

By “rolling up her sleeves” to pitch in and contribute to a collaborative culture among staff in the middle school for initiatives like the Big 6 Process, Sue is quietly leading by example. This is perhaps one of the most effective forms of leadership.

This fall, our community will vote on a \$30 million bond referendum to completely remodel as well as add on to Pine Grove Middle School. Sue was an active member of the committee that was charged with gathering input and presenting recommendations to our Board of Education regarding the educational needs to be considered in the middle school renovation.

Her voluntary presence on such committees speaks volumes about her commitment to lead and to keep the library media center at the forefront of the conversation.

The people that serve on these committees, including Sue, are the early adopters who embrace new ideas to move our district forward. As a successful leader in our school community, she knows that the greatest chance to have a positive impact is by being involved in the decision making process from the beginning.

Sue often visits her nearby alma mater, Syracuse University, to speak to students about the profession. She has accepted and mentored several student teachers in her library.

Beyond the school walls, Sue is involved with organizations at the local, state and national level. She brings these positive experiences and involvements back to her own library and the school.

Always willing to share her knowledge and enthusiasm, Sue is a regular presenter at statewide conferences. Appropriate for her strengths, her recent presentations have focused on librarians as leaders and the impact they can/should make. She also is well versed and has spoken on library promotion, public relations and collaboration.

Further sharing her expertise with colleagues, she frequently writes and submits articles for publication. For example, "New Perspectives on a Familiar Space" was published in the December 2011 issue of *Teacher Librarian: The Journal for School Library Professionals*, an international publication. She has an currently article that was accepted and will be published soon in *Knowledge Quest*, the Journal of the American Association of School Libraries.

She also attends conferences and workshops pursuing professional development opportunities to keep her own skills current in technology, literature, curriculum and assessment. She often secures grants to attend these events. She shares what she learns with her colleagues.

While some people serve as officer of a group or sit on committees so they can say they are involved, Sue wants make a difference.

Sue is currently President of the New York Library Association - Section of School Librarians (NYLA-SSL) and has also served as president elect and in other capacities for that group. She is an active member of the American Library Association (ALA), American Association of School Libraries (AASL), New York Library Association (NYLA) and its affiliate School Library Media Section (SLMS) and local groups as well.

She is past president of the Central New York Media Specialists, a professional school Library Media Specialist organization covering five counties. She is past member of the local Northern Onondaga Public Library board of trustees, a system with three branches.

Sue is an active member and leader of national and state committees focusing her efforts on those that promote the opportunities available for librarians throughout the country. Her work has included serving on the American Library Association (ALA) National Library Week Grant Committee as a past winner, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) as chairperson of the Promotions and Marketing Committee, and the AASL School Library Media Month Task Force.

As a true leader, she doesn't just talk the talk, she gets involved.