

Feature Writing

State Meet • 2022



You are a reporter for the Leaguetown **Press**, the student newspaper of Leaguetown High School.

From the given information, write a **feature story** as you would for the high school newspaper. You may use statements attributed to individuals as **direct or indirect quotes**. You may not change the meaning of a statement. You have **one hour**.

Do not write your name or the name of your school on this sheet or your entry. **Put your number on your paper.**

Leaguetown is in Central Texas and home to the University Interscholastic League. For the past 18 years, Jeanne Acton has directed the University Interscholastic League's journalism program. Acton is 52 years old.

On Aug. 31, Acton will retire. She started her journalism career when she was 14 at Duncanville High School in Duncanville, Texas. By Acton's junior year, she was assistant editor of the school's newspaper, Panther Prints. She was the editor in chief her senior year.

In 1987, Acton headed to the University of Texas at Austin, where she majored in journalism and worked on The Daily Texan staff. In 1991, she was named managing editor of the Texan after working on the paper in various positions for four years. After graduating from UT, Acton worked for a year at a newspaper in the Dallas area and then found her true calling — teaching. She taught journalism for 11 years (one year at Copperas Cove High School and 10 years at Lyndon Baines Johnson High School in Austin). In 2000, Acton returned to UT to get her master's degree in educational leadership. In 2001, she became a high school assistant principal in Austin. In 2004, Acton was hired as the UIL journalism director. At 7 p.m. on May 6, Acton will lead her final State Meet and say goodbye to Leaguetown journalism students. You are writing for the online issue of the Press to be posted at noon on May 6.

■ JEANNE ACTON, UIL journalism director

"It's hard to sum up 18 years, and it's even harder to say goodbye. Working with journalism teachers and journalism students has been the highlight of my career. It's been an incredible ride. I tear up thinking about it. I'm going to have several boxes of Kleenex on stage with me. I am going to need them to get through the final ceremony. Saying goodbye will not be easy, but I know it's time.

"I had a weird beginning in journalism. I took Journalism I in high school because I wanted an easy A. I was a total nerd and was always searching for the A. The class wasn't easy, but I absolutely loved it. I loved giving a voice to students and telling people's stories. Today, every time I speak with journalism students, I try to impress upon them how powerful they are. No other student in the school can give a voice to those with no voice. Journalism is life-changing. I know it changed my life.

"My start at UIL was a little rocky. At my first State Meet, I didn't realize UIL had started awarding team points to journalism. At the State Meet awards ceremony, I finished announcing individual winners and was wrapping up my speech when a journalism coach asked who won team for each conference. I had no idea. I was so embarrassed. I asked for a few minutes, so I could calculate the results. The coaches and students were gracious and patient. No one

■ JEANNE ACTON (cont.)

complained. I knew right then that I was in the perfect spot. Texas journalism students and their coaches are the most knowledgeable, flexible, caring, incredible people. How lucky I have been.

“One of my favorite things at the State Meet is seeing all of the creative T-shirts that schools have come up with over the years. My two favorites are ‘Keep Leaguetown Weird’ and ‘What Happens in Leaguetown, Stays in Leaguetown.’ I still wear those shirts all of the time, and every time I wear one I have to explain where Leaguetown is. It’s everywhere for me.

“The last two years have been rough. I cried a lot in 2020 when I sent out the email saying we would not hold the State Meet because of the pandemic. Last year, we pulled it off but not in Austin. So I missed my favorite part – seeing teachers and students. Instead, I was on a 12-hour zoom call with the rest of the staff as groups of teachers ran small meets across the state. That was probably the weirdest day of my career, but it was worth it.

“It’s hard to leave, but in the end, I know my time at UIL was well spent. I’ve spent the last 18 years promoting one of the noblest professions in the world — journalism. Journalism is a powerful light in this sometimes dark world. I know many high school journalists will not become professional journalists, but they will carry the skills they learned — how to write clearly, how to think critically, how to organize thoughts and arguments — with them wherever they go. We will have a better world because of them. What I would like to say most is — thank you. Thank you to all of the journalism coaches and students who filled my life with joy and happiness for the past 18 years. I am so grateful. What’s next for me? That’s up in the air. I hope to freelance and continue writing, and I hope to continue to work with students at some level. No matter where I go, Leaguetown journalism will always be with me. I am forever a citizen of Leaguetown.”

■ BOBBY HAWTHORNE, former UIL journalism director

“Jeanne was the best hire I ever made, and I made some excellent ones during my almost 30 years with the UIL. When a position as an assistant academic director with the UIL opened in 2004, I essentially ordered her to apply for it. She was the best person for the job, and I wasn’t going to accept ‘no’ for an answer.

“She never once disappointed me. Her passion for the rights of young people as citizens of this free nation was exactly what the UIL needed. She possessed the perfect blend of knowledge, energy and sass. More importantly, she possessed amazing wisdom, empathy and courage. Her reputation as a tireless administrator, a talented writer and dedicated teacher spread quickly across Texas, then the nation. Advisers from coast to coast who know her and have worked with her literally wept when they received word of her decision to step down. As did I.”

■ MARY PULLIAM, Acton’s high school journalism teacher

“Jeanne was 14 years old when she stepped into my Journalism I class her sophomore year. It didn’t take me long to realize that she was a natural writer and born leader. It was only a matter of time until she would start collecting writing awards. Jeanne worked hard and she played hard. She would be one of the first to arrive on newspaper work nights and she never left before Panther Prints was ready to go to the printer. She was also the one to don a McDonald’s Happy Meal hat to add a bit of levity. In the spring of 1986, Jeanne won Duncanville’s first Gold Circle Award at the Columbia Scholastic Press Association convention in New York. It was one of the many state and national individual awards she won during her two years on staff. It was fitting that she wore her prom dress to the ILPC convention her senior year (1987) since she was named Texas’ first Journalist of the Year at the awards ceremony. I hope that Jeanne will wear her prom dress to her final ILPC convention before retirement since so many things are like they were when she was a high school student. She still has sparkling eyes, an infectious laugh, a playful spirit and an unwavering love for scholastic journalism.”

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

STATE • 2022 FEATURE WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.

1. Figure out what the story is about and its theme or focus. This story is about the UIL journalism director retiring.

2. The lead of a feature story must grab the reader's attention. It does not have to be a certain length or include the 5Ws and H. It should set a scene and get the reader into the story. Although you have freedom to describe the scene as you think it might have existed, try to stay as close to the prompt as you can. Some judges will not want you to wander off the subject too much.

At UIL State Journalism Awards ceremony tonight, Journalism Director Jeanne Acton will be surrounded by more than medals and plaques. She'll also have boxes of Kleenex.

"I am going to need them to get through the final ceremony," she said. "Saying goodbye will not be easy, but I know it's time."

3. Once you get past the lead, make sure you include a nut graph. It tells the reader what the story is going to be about. Follow the nut graph with a direct quote and then go into the transition/quote formula.

nut graph

After 18 years with the UIL, Acton will retire on Aug. 31. Tonight marks her final State Meet.

direct quote

"It's hard to sum up 18 years, and it's even harder to say goodbye," she said. "Working with journalism teachers and journalism students has been the highlight of my career. It's been an incredible ride."

4. After you get past the nut graph, the rest of the story can tell itself through the use of the transition/quote formula.

Be sure you attribute after the quote or at least after the first sentence. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution ("Acton said," not "said Acton"). Avoid stacking quotes. Try to avoid putting two or more quotes together without placing some kind of transition between them. Also, make sure transitions provide information to help the action of the story and that the quote does not repeat information in the transition.

transition/story-telling

Her journalism "ride" began when she was a sophomore at Duncanville High School, where she signed up for journalism because she assumed it was an easy A.

direct quote

“The class wasn’t easy, but I absolutely loved it,” she said. “I loved giving a voice to students and telling people’s stories. Today, every time I speak with journalism students, I try to impress upon them how powerful they are. No other student in the school can give a voice to those with no voice.”

transition/story-telling

Acton worked her way up to editor of the “Panther Prints,” the school newspaper, and won Texas High School Journalist of the Year in 1987, along with other awards.

direct quote

“Jeanne worked hard and she played hard,” Mary Pulliam, her high school journalism teacher, said. “She would be one of the first to arrive on newspaper work nights and she never left before Panther Prints was ready to go to the printer. She was also the one to don a McDonald’s Happy Meal hat to add a bit of levity.”

5. Always use third person. Don’t say “our student” or “our own Jeanne Acton.” Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say “Jeanne is the best.” These statements are personal opinions and should not be made in a feature story.

6. Always use the verb “said” as the verb of attribution. Don’t say “says,” “stated,” “feels” or any other synonym for “said.”

7. Finally, look for a strong quote to use as a closing statement or a statement that will bring the reader back to the beginning of the story. It should give the reader a sense of satisfaction or resolution.

Before retiring, Acton said she would like to say one more thing — thank you.

“Thank you to all of the journalism coaches and students who filled my life with joy and happiness for the past 18 years,” she said.

“No matter where I go, Leaguetown journalism will always be with me. I am forever a citizen of Leaguetown.”

SAMPLE STORY

At UIL State Journalism Awards ceremony tonight, Journalism Director Jeanne Acton will be surrounded by more than medals and plaques. She'll also have boxes of Kleenex.

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After 18 years with the UIL, Acton will retire on Aug. 31. Tonight marks her final State Meet.

"It's hard to sum up 18 years, and it's even harder to say goodbye," she said. "Working with journalism teachers and journalism students has been the highlight of my career. It's been an incredible ride."

Her journalism "ride" began when she was a sophomore at Duncanville High School, where she signed up for journalism because she assumed it was an easy A.

"The class wasn't easy, but I absolutely loved it," she said. "I loved giving a voice to students and telling people's stories. Today, every time I speak with journalism students, I try to impress upon them how powerful they are. No other student in the school can give a voice to those with no voice."

Acton worked her way up to editor of the Panther Prints, the school newspaper, and won Texas High School Journalist of the Year in 1987, along with other awards.

"Jeanne worked hard and she played hard," Mary Pulliam, her high school journalism teacher, said. "She would be one of the first to arrive on newspaper work nights and she never left before Panther Prints was ready to go to the printer. She was also the one to don a McDonald's Happy Meal hat to add a bit of levity."

After high school, Acton continued her "ride" at the University of Texas at Austin, where she worked for The Daily Texan. After graduating with a journalism degree from UT, she worked briefly for a Dallas newspaper.

In 2004, after spending 10 years as a high school journalism teacher and three years as a high school administrator, Acton started at UIL.

"Jeanne was the best hire I ever made, and I made some excellent ones during my almost 30 years with the UIL," Bobby Hawthorne, former UIL academic director, said. "When a position as an assistant academic director with the UIL opened in 2004, I essentially ordered her to apply for it. She was the best person for the job, and I wasn't going to accept 'no' for an answer."

Acton's first State Meet wasn't exactly bump-free. She was unaware UIL had started awarding team points for journalism. At the end of the award ceremony, a teacher mentioned the change, and Acton asked the audience for a few moments to calculate the winners.

"The coaches and students were gracious and patient," Acton said. "No one complained. Not once. I knew right then that I was in the perfect spot for me. Texas journalism students and their coaches are the most knowledgeable, flexible, caring, incredible people. How lucky I have been."

Hawthorne said Acton's passion for students and their First Amendment rights was what UIL needed.

"She possessed the perfect blend of knowledge, energy and sass," he said. "More importantly, she possessed amazing wisdom, empathy and courage. Her reputation as a tireless administrator, a talented writer and as a dedicated teacher spread quickly across the nation."

While journalists are often reviled and ridiculed, Acton said journalism is "life-changing" and one of the noblest professions in the world.

"Journalism is a powerful light in this sometimes dark world," she said. "I know many high school journalists will not become professional journalists, but they will carry the skills they learned — how to write, how to think critically, how to organize thoughts and arguments — with them wherever they go. We will have a better world because of them."

Before retiring, Acton said she would like to say one more thing — thank you.

"Thank you to all of the journalism coaches and students who filled my life with joy and happiness for the past 18 years," she said.

"No matter where I go, Leaguetown journalism will always be with me. I am forever a citizen of Leaguetown."

2022 FEATURE WRITING STATE CHAMPIONS

1A

Brylie Leach - Savoy HS

The room is silent besides the gentle tapping of several fingers on a keyboard. There's a faint buzz from the printers plugged in around the room. Suddenly a printer contracts and spits out a warm sheet of white printer paper, that is filled with words written by a nervous student competing at their State UIL meet. The student lets out a gentle sign of relief and walks the final paper to the front of the room as they inhale the faint scent of printer ink. As they look up, they make eye contact with UIL journalism director, Jeanne Acton. In the moment their eyes connect, the student's anxiety eases as they know Acton believes in them and their ability.

For 18 glorious years, Acton has directed the University Interscholastic League's journalism program. At 52 years old, Acton has decided to retire on August, 31. On May 6, at 7 p.m., Acton will lead her final State Meet, and say a final goodbye to all of the Leaguetown journalism students.

"It's hard to come up 18 years, and it's even harder to say goodbye," Acton said. "Working with journalism teachers and journalism students has been the highlight of my career. It's been an incredible ride."

The start of Acton's love of journalism began in Duncanville, Texas at Duncanville High School when she was only 14 years old. By her junior year of high school, she was the assistant editor of the school's newspaper, Panther Prints. She quickly progressed to editor in chief her senior year.

"I had a weird beginning in journalism," Acton said. "I was a total nerd and was always searching for the A. I took Journalism in high school because I wanted an easy A. The class wasn't easy, but I absolutely loved it."

Acton started attending college at the University of Texas at Austin in 1987. She majored in journalism and worked on The Daily Texan staff. Over a course of 4 years, Acton worked on the paper in various positions until she was named managing editor of the Texan in 1991.

"I loved giving a voice to students and telling people's stories," Acton said. "Today, every time I speak with journalism students, I try to impress upon them how powerful they are. No other student in the school can give a voice to those with no voice."

Once Acton graduated from UT, she worked for a year at a newspaper in Dallas until she discovered what she was really meant to do, teach the next generation of journalists. She taught journalism for 11 years until she went back to school in 2000, in order to gain her master's degree in educational leadership, and from there, in 2001, Acton worked as a high school assistant principal in Austin. In 2004, Acton was hired as the UIL journalism director.

"Jeanne was the best hire I ever made, and I made some excellent ones during my almost 30 years with the UIL," former UIL journalism director, Bobby Hawthorne said. "Her passion for the rights of young people as citizens of this free nation was exactly what the UIL needed. Her reputation as a tireless administrator, a talented writer, and a dedicated teacher spread quickly across Texas, then the nation."

Although Acton faced a few roadblocks during her time as a UIL journalism director, she still impacted students and adults alike across the nation. Many wept upon hearing her decision to step down. Based on the feedback already received, her impact will continuously live on in the hearts of individuals across the nation for many years to come.

“Texas journalism students and their coaches are the most knowledgeable, flexible, caring, and incredible people,” Acton said. “Journalism is a powerful light in this sometimes dark world. Thank you to all of the journalism coaches and students who filled my life with joy and happiness for the past 18 years.”

2A

Jaymie Russell - Coleman HS

The thud of feet hitting the ground echoes through the room of contestants. The wined voiced of Journalism director Jeanne Acton grabs the attention of everyone in the room. She dances across the stage in her stretchy dress, knowing it'll be her last time doing so.

Fifty-two-year-old Jeanne has directed the University Interscholastic League's journalism program for the last 18 years. Through years of joy and meeting new people, her journey in journalism will come to an end Aug. 31, when she will retire from promoting one of the noblest professions in the world.

Though the thought of leaving saddens Jeanne, she knows her time at UIL was well spent.

"It's hard to sum up 18 years, and it's even harder to say goodbye," Jeanne said. "Working with my journalism teachers and students has been the highlight of my career."

Jeanne had a weird beginning in journalism, but overtime she found power in the voice that it enabled her to have.

"I took journalism in high school because I wanted an easy A," Jeanne said. "The class wasn't easy, but I absolutely loved it."

Jeanne's high school journalism teacher Mary Pulliam, recognized her talent for journalism when she was young, and has always supported her and her career.

"Jeanne was 14 years old when she stepped into my Journalism I class her sophomore year," Pulliam said. "It didn't take me long to realize that she was a natural writer and born leader."

The start of UIL for Jeanne was a little rock, but the patience and support from the contestants and teachers assured her, that this was the right place for her to be.

"At my first State Meet, I didn't realize UIL had started awarding teams points in journalism," Jeanne said. "I asked for a few minutes to calculate the results. No one complained. I knew right then that I was in the perfect spot."

Former UIL journalism director, Bobby Hawthorne, says Jeanne was the best hire he ever made during his almost 30 years with UIL. Possessing the perfect amount of knowledge, energy and sass, she was the right one for the job.

"She never once disappointed me," Hawthorne said. "Her passion for the rights of young people as citizens of this free nation was exactly what the UIL needed."

No matter where Jeanne goes, Leaguetown journalism will forever hold a special place in her heart.

"It's been an incredible ride," Jeanne said. "Saying goodbye will not be easy, but I know it's time. I am forever a citizen of Leaguetown."

3A

Claire Nelson - Wall HS

She danced. She swayed. She leaped across the stage.

In front of 48 journalism students.

"I've spent the last 18 years promoting one of the noblest professions in the world—journalism," Jeanne Acton said.

Now Acton must say goodbye, and she is taking her dance moves with her.

Acton plans to step down from directing the University Interscholastic League's journalism program since 2004. Acton will oversee her final State Meet at 7 p.m.

"Working with journalism teachers and journalism students has been the highlight of my career," Acton said. "It's been an incredible ride."

Acton began her journalism career at Duncanville High School and was promoted to editor in chief of Panther Prints, the school's newspaper, her senior year.

"I took Journalism I in high school because I wanted an easy A," Acton said. "The class wasn't easy, but I absolutely loved it. I loved giving a voice to students and telling people's stories."

According to Mary Pulliam, Acton's high school journalism teacher, Acton won Duncanville's first Gold Circle Award and was named Texas' first Journalist of the Year during her two years on staff.

"It didn't take me long to realize that she was a natural writer and born leader," Pulliam said. "She still has sparkling eyes, an infectious laugh, a playful spirit and an unwavering love for scholastic journalism."

Acton is a former student at the University of Texas at Austin and taught journalism for 11 years. She was the best hire, according to former UIL journalism director Bobby Hawthorne.

"When a position as an assistant academic director with the UIL opened in 2004, I essentially ordered her to apply for it," Hawthorne said. "She was the best person for the job, and I wasn't going to take 'no' for an answer."

Acton said she has been lucky to work with Texas journalism students. She hopes to continue that work after retirement.

"What I would like to say most is—thank you," Acton said. "Thank you to all of the journalism coaches and students who filled my life with joy and happiness for the past 18 years. I am so grateful."

4A

Vivi Lehman - Lindale HS

Eighteen.

That is how many years she has spent as a UIL journalism director. Through thick and thin, mistakes and mishaps, everything she did was meant to support budding high school journalists to the fullest. Now, with one last meet to run and many, many boxes of Kleenex on hand, Jeanne Acton prepares to say goodbye.

The 52-year-old Acton is retiring from her position as UIL journalism director on August 31. She will lead her final state meet and say farewell to Leaguetown journalism students at 7 p.m. today.

"It's hard to sum up 18 years, and it's even harder to say goodbye," Acton said. "Working with journalism teachers and journalism students has been the highlight of my career. It's been an incredible ride."

Acton's first foray into journalism was at 14, when she started attending Duncanville High School. By junior year, she was assistant editor of the school's newspaper, then editor-in-chief the year after.

"I took Journalism in high school because I wanted an easy A," Acton said. "The class wasn't easy, but I absolutely loved it. I loved giving a voice to students and telling people's stories. Today, every time I speak with journalism students, I try and impress upon them how powerful they are. Journalism is life-changing. I know it changed my life."

In 1986, Acton won Duncanville's first Gold Circle Award at the Columbia Scholastic Press Association convention in New York: one award of many to come. She wore her prom dress to the ILPC convention her senior year when she was named Texas' first Journalist of the Year.

"Jeanne worked hard, and she played hard," Mary Pulliam, Acton's high school journalism teacher, said. "She would be one of the first to arrive on newspaper work nights and she never left before Panther Prints was ready to go to the printer. It was only a matter of time until she would start collecting writing awards."

Acton's love of journalism continued when she majored in the subject at the University of Texas at Austin, where she was also managing editor of The Daily Texan. After graduation, she found her passion in teaching, working for 11 years at two different schools before returning to UT to get her master's degree in educational leadership. After a stint as an assistant principal, in 2004, she finally entered the UIL playground.

"Jeanne was the best hire I ever made, and I made some excellent ones during my almost 30 years with UIL," former UIL journalism director Bobby Hawthorne said. "Her passion for the rights of young people as citizens of this free nation was exactly what UIL needed. She possessed the perfect blend of knowledge, energy and sass. More importantly, she possessed amazing wisdom, empathy and courage. She never once disappointed me."

The start of Acton's UIL career was not completely without fault. At her first State Meet, she forgot to award team points to journalism, not realizing her error until a coach asked who won team for each conference. However, even with a few bumps on the road, Acton pulled through with a long, fruitful career as director.

“Journalism is a powerful light in this sometimes dark world,” Acton said. “I know many high school journalists will not become professional journalists, but they will carry the skills they learned with them wherever they go. We will have a better world because of them.”

Acton’s tentative plans for the future include freelancing and continuing her work with students. No matter where she goes, however, she has made her mark on UIL journalism.

“What I would like to say most is—thank you,” Acton said. “Thank you to all the journalism coaches and students who filled my life with joy and happiness for the past 18 years. I am so grateful. No matter where I go, Leaguetown journalism will always be with me.”

Commanding the room's attention and with a beat entirely of her own making, she began to move. At first, a little wiggle. Then, a strut or two. And by the time the assistants had finished passing out papers to eager students, she was in a Just Dance world of her creation. Jeanne Acton was leaving, but she was going to go out with a bang. A groovy bang.

Acton, director of the University Interscholastic League's journalism program, announced that after 18 years on the job, she has made the decision to retire. This Friday, UIL journalism students will have their final State Meet with Acton as the director.

"I tear up thinking about it," Acton said. "I'm going to have several boxes of Kleenex on stage with me. Saying goodbye will not be easy, but I know it's time."

Acton had her start in journalism back in her hometown, at Duncanville High School. At the age of 14, she decided to take the course not because she was interested, but because she wanted an easy A. However, she didn't expect what came next.

"I was a total nerd and was always searching for the A," Acton said. "The class wasn't easy, but I absolutely loved it. I loved giving a voice to students and telling people's stories. Journalism is life-changing. I know it changed my life."

Mary Pulliam, Acton's high school journalism teacher, knew from the start that Acton had great potential for journalism and leadership.

"She would be one of the first to arrive on newspaper work nights and she never left before Panther Prints was ready to go to the printer," Pulliam said. "It was fitting that she wore her prom dress to the ILPC convention her senior year since she was named Texas' first Journalist of the Year at the awards ceremony. I hope that Jeanne will wear her prom dress to her final ILPC convention before retirement since so many things are like they were when she was a high school student. She still has sparkling eyes, an infectious laugh, a playful spirit and an unwavering love for scholastic journalism."

For Bobby Hawthorne, former UIL journalism director, Acton was the first person he had in mind for UIL assistant academic director. And she never once disappointed him.

"Her passion for the rights of young people as citizens of this free nation was exactly what the UIL needed," Hawthorne said. "Her reputation as a tireless administrator, a talented writer and dedicated teacher spread quickly across Texas, then the nation. Advisors from coast to coast who know her and have worked with her literally wept when they received work of her decision to step down. As did I."

However, Acton didn't get this admiration and respect overnight. She has gone through trial and error on her journey to where she is now. At her first State Meet, she forgot to award team points to UIL journalists.

"I was so embarrassed," she said. "I asked for a few minutes, so I could calculate the results. The coaches and students were gracious and patient. I knew right then that I was in the perfect spot. Texas journalism students and their coaches are one of the most knowledgeable, flexible, caring, incredible people. How lucky I have been."

Acton might not know what's next for her in life but she knows that her time at UIL was well spent. After all, she had the opportunity to promote what, to her, is one of the noblest professions in the world—journalism.

“Journalism is a powerful light in this sometimes dark world,” Acton said. “I know many high school journalists will not become professional journalists, but they will carry the skills they learned—how to write clearly, how to think critically, how to organize thoughts and arguments—with them wherever they go. We will have a better world because of them.”

Most of all, Acton is thankful, and grateful. Especially for all the journalism coaches and students who have made her life full of joy and happiness. Her experience at UIL will never leave her.

“No matter where I go, Leaguetown journalism will always be with me,” Acton said. “I am forever a citizen of Leaguetown.”

State gold is a hop, skip, and jump away—for one person at least.

Students living in the San Jacinto dorm at the University of Texas at Austin may be confused to glance in the multipurpose room and see a woman dancing on stage in front of an audience of teenagers. She leaps, wiggles and moves her arms all about across the stage. However, the woman is no kind of interpretive dancer, and she is not giving a performance. It is UIL journalism director Jeanne Acton, and she is conducting the UIL State Meet.

After serving as the UIL journalism director for 18 years, Jeanne Acton will conduct her final UIL Journalism State Meet tonight before her retirement on Aug. 31.

“It’s hard to sum up 18 years, and it’s even harder to say goodbye,” Acton said. “Working with journalism teachers and journalism students has been the highlight of my career.”

Acton began her career as a journalism at Duncanville High School in Duncanville, Texas, where she enrolled in journalism at age 14. She served as the assistant editor and editor-in-chief of the school’s newspaper, Panther Prints. During high school, she was honored with a Gold Circle Award at the Columbia Scholastic Press Association convention in New York, and she was named Texas’ journalist of the year at the 1987 ILPC convention.

“It didn’t take me long to realize that she was a natural writer and born leader,” Acton’s high school Journalism teacher, Mary Pulliam, said. “Jeanne worked hard and she played hard.”

After high school, Acton attended the University of Texas at Austin, where she studied journalism and worked as a staff member of The Daily Texan, which she was named managing editor of in 1991. Once she graduated from UT, Acton worked at a Dallas newspaper for one year before becoming a journalism teacher.

“Every time I speak with journalism students, I try to impress upon them how powerful they are,” Acton said. “No other student in the school can give a voice to those with no voice.”

She taught the subject for 11 years at Copperas Cove High School and Lyndon Baines Johnson High School in Austin before returning to UT for her master’s degree in educational leadership. In 2001, Acton became a high school assistant principal. Three years later, in 2004, she was hired as the UIL journalism director, the position she has served ever since.

“Jeanne was the best hire I ever made,” former UIL journalism director Bobby Hawthorne said. “She was the best person for the job, and I wasn’t going to accept ‘no’ for an answer.”

Acton runs the Journalism UIL State Meet every year. While tonight’s award ceremony will be her 18th, her first UIL awards didn’t quite go to plan.

“At my first state meet, I didn’t realize UIL had started awarding team points to journalism,” Acton said. “The coaches and students were gracious and patient. I knew right then that I was in the perfect spot.”

While she will no longer be serving as director, Acton plans to continue working in journalism as a freelance writer. She also hopes to continue working with students at some level.

“Journalism is a powerful light in this sometimes dark world,” Acton said. “I know many high school journalists will not become professional journalists, but they will carry the skills they learned with them wherever they go. We will have a better world because of them.”