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## TODAY'S WEATHER



**HIGH**  
**76**  
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**57**

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# Joliet book earns national honors

Marianne Wolf-Astrauskas: 'It's a nice reward for working on it'

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Before the 50th anniversary of the combined Joliet schools that now comprise Joliet Catholic Academy, one alumnus created a comprehensive reunion book.

Marianne Wolf-Astrauskas of Orland Park said she created the book while caring for her husband, Jonas, a brain cancer survivor who is paralyzed on his right side.

And now the JCA reunion book has won two awards.

After winning first place in the Illinois Woman's Press Association Professional Communication's Contest on May 27, the book qualified for the national competition, the National Federation of Press Women said in a news release announcing the winners.

The JCA reunion book subsequently earned honorable mention in the National Federation of Press Women's Professional Communications Contest on June 24. Wolf-Astrauskas said she was thrilled her work was recognized on a national level.

"It's like buying a lottery ticket. You don't know if you're going to win or not," Wolf-Astrauskas said. "You just hope you pick the right project. And you hope the judges like the finished product. It's a nice reward for working on it."

Teri Ehresman, NFPW contest director, said in an email that the contest attracted about 2,000 entries in 2023. Of those, 516 advanced to the national contest. Ehresman said in the email that the Illinois judge described Wolf-Astrauskas' entry as having "excellent overall layout and design, including placement of photographs and artwork."

That did not surprise Ehresman.

"Marianne always submits outstanding entries in our national contest and frequently is recognized on the national level," Ehresman said in the email. "She is an outstanding communicator and has won national awards in several different contest categories."

In the months preceding the 50th anniversary of the former St. Francis Academy (an all-girls school) and Joliet Catholic High (an all-boys school), Wolf-Astrauskas documented the unique history of both schools, which she published in a large 70-page book.

Wolf-Astrauskas previously said people new to the Joliet area might not realize that Joliet Catholic Academy



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Marianne Wolf-Astrauskas points Sept. 20, 2022, to aunts posing in an older framed photo in front of the old St. Joseph Catholic Church in Joliet. She used that photo in her 2016 book on Joliet. Wolf-Astrauskas created a 70-page book for the combined 50th reunion of the former Catholic High School and St. Francis Academy.

was two schools up until 1990.

This reunion book was distributed to attendees during reunion activities the weekend of Sept. 16 to 18 in 2022.

This wasn't the first project Wolf-Astrauskas tackled while caring for Jonas. While he was recovering from his brain tumor in 2013, Wolf-Astrauskas researched and wrote the short book titled "Leadership 1937-2003, The First Forty Presidents of the National Federation of Press Women."

"He had to be in the house, and I had the idea for this book," Wolf-Astrauskas said, later adding that "Everybody said to me, 'How did you write this book? He had surgery.' He was recuperating, resting in one room, and I was right next to him in my office doing my research. If he needed me, I was right there."

So when discussions arose in 2021 about a reunion booklet, Wolf-Astrauskas said she saw another opportunity to use her skills from home.

"I could take care of my husband," Wolf-Astrauskas said. "And when he didn't need me, I could work on the book. It was really a labor of love to my

classmates. I wanted to look back and everything, remember everything in that time period that influenced us."

Wolf-Astrauskas said people tend to forget how different things were in the past and how different it was for teens 50 years ago. She referenced cellphones and all its features, from the internet to cameras, as an example. She said she feels today's teens face more challenges than teenagers did five decades ago.

"We were more carefree as teenagers," Wolf-Astrauskas said.

The reunion book also included a directory of classmates: then and now photos, brief facts of their lives and contact information. The book also contained a letter from current JCA President Jeffrey Budz and well-wishes and letters from former teachers.

Wolf-Astrauskas also listed former faculty from both schools, notable alumni and outstanding achievers, trivia questions about both schools and two pages of memorials with photos of classmates who have died.

She also placed 1972 in context for the alumni by featuring milestones in

men's and women's sports, historical events happening in the world and prices of common items at the time.

To find information, Wolf-Astrauskas said she sifted through her own memorabilia: yearbooks from both schools, school newspapers (The Focus for St. Francis and Victory Light for Catholic High), programs from plays and musicals, a mimeographed sheet of the Catholic High loyalty song, bids and photos from dances, and even WHO's St. Francis uniform that her mother had saved for her.

Photos were the hardest to acquire because teenagers in 1972 didn't carry cameras with them every day similar to today's teens with their phones, Wolf-Astrauskas previously said.

"I'm just so proud of it and just so happy I was able to do that," Wolf-Astrauskas said. "I knew how hard I worked on it. I knew how much time it took to design it and figure out how to lay it out and to find the information. I'm not 17 anymore. I had to make sure it was right, verify everything. It was a lot of work."