

SLUG: TEAM MOM

Contact: John Dillon, journalism faculty, jad53@psu.edu

By Katie Huber

Penn State journalism student

KDH5065@psu.edu

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. -- When she walks in the front door of her home, Sally Weakland is greeted with a view that would make any Penn Stater jealous. Through a 20-foot-wide picture window, she sees the Bryce Jordan Center and Beaver Stadium a half-mile in the distance. The view captures her passion and her life perfectly.

Weakland is more than a familiar face at Penn State sporting events; she is popularly known as Sally, the unofficial “team mom” who pours her heart into everything she does.

Sally’s involvement includes the Quarterback Club, the Tailback Club, the Hoops Club, the Nittany Lion Club and Volleyball Boosters. She is a season-ticket holder for football, basketball and ice hockey, and attends volleyball, soccer and lacrosse games.

She has had the most impact on the men’s basketball team. She became involved after meeting the families of former player Mike Walker and senior Danny Morrissey five years ago. She and their mothers immediately bonded.

“It just began as trying to do something a little extra to make them feel at home,” Sally said.

Sally’s diamond-encrusted Penn State watch dazzles as she serves fresh iced tea. Her hair was recently spruced up with blonde and caramel highlights in preparation for the basketball

banquet, she said. As a replay of Penn State's victorious NIT championship game played in the background, she talked about her efforts to make the team feel loved.

She knows every player's favorite cake and cookie. Whether it's finding Jamelle Cornley strawberry cake with strawberry icing or making goodie bags, Sally does a lot for the team.

Last season, she was named the Hoops Club member of the year.

The award resulted from a poster she made for the team when it had more losses than wins. The poster was a montage of pictures and quotes with the goal of reminding the players that they are wonderful men, she said.

Her favorite quote on the board is "if you're going through hell, keep going," because it is something she lives by. She equated her personal struggles to the season.

"I told them, 'You might not hear it all the time, but we know you can do it, and the team *will* turn the corner,'" she said.

A season later, the team apparently had listened to its number one fan, setting program records and bringing home the hardware from the National Invitational Tournament.

Three days after she graduated from high school in 1968, Sally began her freshman year at Penn State. She met Richard Weakland, a brother of Tau Delta Phi, and they married in June 1970 when Richard was drafted during the Vietnam War. They spent four years in Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas, where Richard was in the Air Force and then lived in Alexandria, Va., for nearly 30 years.

Season-ticket holders since the 1970s, the Weaklands spent nearly every football weekend in Happy Valley and stayed involved in the Penn State community. Their daughter, Christine Laur, is a Penn State graduate.

In June 1999, Sally's world changed. Her husband was diagnosed with a stage five brain tumor.

Forced to retire from the IRS, he wanted to come back to State College to pass away. "That's why I built this house," Sally explained. She planned to sell it in five years, but after Richard's death in May 2001 she couldn't bring herself to leave so quickly.

Now, in a five-bedroom home decorated with Penn State memorabilia and Waterford crystal, Sally is a woman trying to figure out what's next in her life.

In the meantime, she is living the dream that she and her husband shared. They had planned on retiring at 55 and moving to State College to indulge in the sports atmosphere and enjoy the familiar Penn State bubble.

Sally fills the role of team mom with love and kind acts for the basketball team. Everything comes together, she said, when she attends graduation and is awed by the accomplishments of the student athletes.

"Sally was unbelievable while I was in Happy Valley," said 2008 Penn State graduate Mike Walker. "Her attitude towards the team did not change whether we were winning or losing. She always had the same support for the team. People like Sally are what Penn State is all about."

Sally said she doesn't know what the future holds. While she would like to escape the cold of State College and the memories that cloud her life, she doesn't know if she could survive without doing what she loves.

“Sally is a special person who has been a great fan, loyal supporter and wonderful friend to our basketball family,” said Coach Ed DeChellis. “She is always there for the team to see us depart for our away games, and it is a pleasure to have Sally as part of our extended family.”

Sally Weakland has affected students, athletes and coaches. And, should she leave, who would make sure that guard Talor Battle didn't have nuts in his chocolate chip cookies?