

William Arthur Ward once said, “The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.” With all that has happened since we’ve last gathered for an in-person debate tournament, inspiration is not only hard to come by, but it sought out, and cherished. Thankfully, if you have ever encountered this person, you quickly learned that the only thing you must do to be inspired is to wait and listen. This is why I would like to take a few moments and formally nominate Sheila Ritchie for the Bennett Strange Coach of the Year Award.

After spending any amount of time around Sheila, you will immediately notice three things- how enthusiastically she greets you, how attentively she listens to you, and how intentionally she handles her interactions with you. I believe this is because Sheila does not just care for people- she seeks to understand them, and to make them feel visible. Even as a coach, I must admit how transformative a Sheila Ritchie conversation can be. She truly inspires you to be a better version of yourself, for the benefit of others.

I also believe that Sheila has earned her well-deserved reputation of being an amazing coach, friend, and mentor in our organization. Not only is she beloved nearly universally in our organization, but she instills those same values in her debaters, as well. The ACU Debate Team is an inspirational example of how to combine ethics, intelligence, class, and a genuine love of people with the world of speech and debate. Most importantly, Sheila is not only an amazing colleague and person, but she is a inspirational (and aspirational) friend to all. The world would undoubtedly be much better if we had more “Sheilas” in it. Since I “legally” cannot nominate her to be cloned, I proudly nominate her to be recognized as the 2020-2021 Bennett Strange Coach of the Year.

At your service,

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