

Community Bids Farewell to Jana Mackey

By [Sarah Burris](#)

July 16, 2008



I was having a conversation with a friend yesterday who told me that there were so many people that didn't know Jana until after her death. Those were glued to the news and blogs looking for details about the case and about the friends and family who mourned her loss in Lawrence.

But, my friend said, that there was a huge gap in information following the funeral. Many of those who weren't in attendance didn't hear about the events and missed out on the opportunity to learn even more about this amazing activist who left us all too soon.

The first update I can give is that the [Facebook page](#) (must be logged in) has 117 wall posts, and 66 pictures that have been posted by the now 817 supporters. To put that in context, Jim Slattery who is running for US Senate in Kansas has 819 supporters.

There have also been [many many blogs posted](#) and [news pieces](#) about Jana, Women's E-News did an [In Memoriam](#) that included her, and so much support from the community.

According to the [Hays Daily News](#), there were over 1,100 people at the event. Liberty Hall was so full that there were people standing along the wall downstairs. They had to start later because there was a line down the block to get in the door. The kind of line you see waiting for a concert on a Friday night.

A political activist, Mackey was a lobbyist for social justice. She worked as an advocate for a nonprofit organization that provides support for survivors of sexual assault.

This summer, she was enrolled in a project in which she represented state and federal prisoners.

"Jana drew her circle large," said Gail Agrawal, dean of the School of Law at KU. "I regret more than I can say that we will not come to know the lawyer Jana would have been."

In short, Mackey touched a lot of people.

As for the service itself it was very, very difficult. I know that it was meant to be a celebration but it was a very sad event. I haven't cried like that in I don't even know how long. There were lots of pictures, and most of the speakers tried to bring the fun/funny part of Jana to the crowd as well.

The Law School Dean went first, and spoke of Jana's passion for justice and law, and her ability to put aside her own beliefs to ensure that people were receiving the legal assistance they deserved. She talked about the promise Jana had and the disappointment we all share knowing that we all lost a strong advocate.

State Senator Laura Kelly followed bringing the comments and messages of support from other Kansas leaders including State Legislators, Rep. Nancy Boyda, as well as Governor Sebelius. Laura surprised me when she said that she felt like Jana accomplished more in her life than she (Laura) had in her own - in more than twice the time. Laura spoke of service and dedication to one's community, a value Jana held dear. It was then that I began to tear up, just thinking about the fun times we had together and how much I'd missed out on in the last year that I was gone.

When Laura brought the condolences of the Governor it came with a flag that had flown over the capital. Laura walked down and handed it to the family, like officers do to the families of fallen soldiers. That's when I started sobbing. And looking back on it I think of it a lot in the same way. She gave her life serving... and working to make the world a better place.

Sarah Jane Russell spoke about Jana's dedication to women and those who suffer from domestic violence. She described a sign on the wall in their office that said "honey on steel" and how Jana understood what that meant to the movement.

The final speaker was Jana's step-dad Curt who spoke the words we all were asking. Why? Why now?

"She had so much work to do, and she had just started making a difference," Brungardt said. "Through her death she can touch many lives. Her single torch has turned to 1,100 torches here today."

"Most funerals celebrate a person's life; that's not enough for Jana," he added. "This ceremony is a call for action. I'm now handing you her torch. Make Jana proud, and go do great things."

It ended with a call to action for all of us. The 1100 people in attendance received a direct ask that we should move forward to make a difference. Whether partisan or not, there are things that mattered to Jana that we must carry on and advocate for in her absence.

Already I've had a great conversation with a friend Jana and I shared about what more we can do. How we can energize our communities and how we can make a greater impact in Kansas and indeed everywhere.

The question now is what will you do?