

Ernest “Ernie” Poletti

CHSSA HALL OF FAME 1987



Born in Stockton, California, Ernie led a deliberate and earnest life committed to education, sportsmanship and citizenship.

As a youth, he participated in public oratory performances, fueling a lifelong passion for speech and debate. He graduated from Stockton High School in 1932, and went on to attend College of the Pacific (now University of the Pacific) where he competed on the debate team for four years. While ranked number one on the men's debate team at COP he met Ellice, who was the number one women's debater. They married and had two daughters, both of whom appropriately became successful debaters.

Ernie graduated from the College of the Pacific in 1936, Magnum Cum Laude, with both a Bachelor of Arts and Masters Degree in political science. Upon graduation, he started his career as a teacher and debate coach at Ripon High School where he coached from 1937-1961. He then moved to Tracy High School where he taught and coached from 1961 until his retirement in 1978.

Ernie is perhaps best known for pioneering and developing his own speech methodology based on his college thesis. The method, which he called "Streamline Speech" included perpetual intramural tournaments to help prepare students for interschool competition. Thus, Ernie became instrumental in driving the organization of formal debate competition for high schools. Most notably, he was the founder of the Northern California Speech and Debate League which was the northern California league that preceded the California High School Speech Association. In the late 1950's he became a founding member in the formation of CHSSA.

Ernie's students enjoyed a great deal of competitive success, but Ernie took pride in raising the ability of his entire team. For his pioneering contributions to the California High School Speech Association and its students Ernest "Ernie" Poletti was inducted as one of the original ten founding members of the CHSSA Hall of Fame in 1987.

In addition to being a revered teacher and forensics coach, Ernie Poletti was fiercely patriotic and embraced his role as a citizen. Based on his rich knowledge of political history, he cherished the political freedom and rights enjoyed in America and saw high school speech as a way to infuse that passion into new generations of students. Ernie remained engaged with current affairs throughout his life, always ready for a debate.

In 1979, the California State Senate honored Ernie Poletti with a commendation for his contributions to speech education.

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