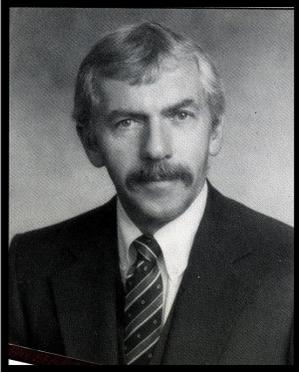


James “Mac” McDonnell

CHSSA HALL OF FAME 1990



A native of a small Illinois town, Jim McDonnell, was known to his friends and students as Mac. Before becoming a teacher at La Canada High School in the 1960's, Mac served in the US Navy in the mid 1950's. Once at La Canada he was the speech coach, drama teacher, English teacher, journalism teacher, yearbook sponsor and academic decathlon coach!

Jim served the speech community as SCDL president for four years before serving as CHSSA president for two terms. People quickly realized that despite Jim's many school obligations Jim's intelligence and resourcefulness were both great assets in a crisis. Fellow league members affectionately recall that in 1983 when he forgot to order the

trophies for SCDL's fall varsity tournament, he gave out monetary awards instead: \$15 for first; \$10 for second and \$5 for third. Longtime SCDL co-coach Greg Cullen writes, "He was an excellent tournament host. He had the ability to set up and run a tournament - without a computer - at lightning speed and was able to keep most of it in his head. He could run state council and local meetings as well as awards assemblies at a record pace. When Jim was in charge you knew you'd be home early."

Jim was always very resourceful and successful as a debate coach and frequently recruited students from drama, journalism and yearbook classes to fill the ranks of his debate team. His students enjoyed a great deal of success qualifying for many state and national tournaments. They were among the finalists and winners in most of their events. One of his students, Maria Caron, was the Rose Bowl Queen in 1978. She also competed at nationals in dramatic interp that same year. Another student, John Belcher, took a second in impromptu at nationals in 1974.

CHSSA Hall of Famer Greg Cullen recalls that, "It was inevitable, given Mac's busy schedule he would at times get dates mixed. In 1983 he made flight and hotel reservations for NFL nationals in Kansas City where he was to help in extemp tab. The only problem was that he arrived in Kansas City on a Sunday, went to the hotel to check in, asked where everyone was and was informed that the tournament ended the day before. Jim calmly repacked his bag, went to the airport, purchased a ticket to Virginia Beach and went sailing with friends, just as he did every year after nationals."

Mac was a great friend to many, with a wonderful, if droll, sense of humor. In addition to his many school responsibilities Mac was an accomplished chef who loved to give dinner parties for his friends and SCDL coaches a couple times a year. His favorite was mushroom chicken. He owned a large old house built by Ann Sheridan and George Brent in the 1940's. Jim restored the house to its original glory with polished wood floors, Persian rugs, leather furniture and a massive white grand piano. Sadly, Mac passed away in August of 1990 of liver cancer.

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