

Donovan Cummings' Service Above Self Award Winner

Derek Yuill

Gabrielino High School

"Are you doing alright?" As I scanned thousands of pages of ballots and posting sheets, and every other thing that was handed to me on a scanner that was, frankly, too slow at its job, those words gently brought me back to reality at the 2014 State Tournament. Derek Yuill, head coach of the incredible Gabrielino High School speech and debate program was standing in front of me asking how I was doing. While the scanner softly whirred in the background Derek drew my attention away from the machine that had consumed every second of my time for the past two days. This was not to distract me, but because Derek wanted to make sure that I was ok, and because he was



concerned. That moment stands out to me as one of those times when a legendary coach shows why they are so successful, because they care.

The Donovan Cummings Service Above Self award is about more than just being committed to speech and debate. This award is about taking those next steps to make sure that our community

maintains and grows the coaches, leaders, and people who are doing the work to run our tournaments, coach our students, and build our programs. From this first interaction to every interaction I have had with him since, it is clear that Derek Yuill always strives to make our activity more accessible, caring, and inclusive. Whether it is helping with the state tournament, making the lives of coaches easier by training and advocating for them, or planning creative ways to get the community together for even non-competitive experiences, his career is filled with respect for the work.

Ashley Novak, SCDL President, and longtime colleague of Derek explains, "I've been working with Derek since 2000 and he spends countless hours thinking about how we can consistently do better. The most recent example of this was during the depths of the pandemic. Tabroom was just terrible. Just about every single improvement--and there were



hundreds of them-- was made because of those countless hours he spent on the phone with the NSDA just trying to make it simpler for all of us. If you notice that it is better, it's because of Derek. He never has any ulterior motives other than making competition fair and equitable for all kids. Even though his kids regularly are very successful, he's very aware of the need for other schools to be noticed and creates so many opportunities for them to grow and thrive."

Former Vice President of Activities Nermin Fraser agrees, "Derek really is the embodiment of Service Above Self - I have counted him as a friend, colleague and mentor for 20+ years and in that time he has never made a decision that wasn't 100% laser focused on making things better for the kids."



Indeed in every conversation you have about Derek the common thread is that he is someone who steps up, and makes things happen. Jessica Wilkerson from San Gabriel High School says "Derek believes in the Speech and Debate program and makes it his job to ensure that all students have the opportunity to participate. He's ALWAYS willing to help if it means that students are in the program, participating, and having fun with it." And Area 3 Chair Leilani Mchugh shares, "As we've returned to in-person tournaments, he is the first to step-up as a hosting school and in celebration of this return and of high school Speech & Debate, he has organized Speech & Debate Day at Knotts Berry Farm in May, an opportunity for our students to come together outside of competition. We hope to see other teams in California come and enjoy the 2nd such Speech & Debate Day that Derek has planned. This year scheduled for May 16th, 2023."

Angelique Ronald, current tournament director and Vice President of Activities is always welcoming of the support Derek provides. "I (very selfishly) appreciate that Derek is always available to talk through issues and brainstorm solutions, always just a phone call away, even at absurd hours of the night. It's something that I have always been so thankful for-- and so have the last four State Tournament Directors, since we've all done the same. He would absolutely hate me saying so, but Derek is an integral part of the annual success of our State Tournament."

Despite his aversion to the spotlight, Derek has been bringing positive attention and growth to our activity as a coach for many years, and his hard work and dedication are something we all can aspire to as we continue to build out the important activity of Forensics in the state of California. It is a great honor for the California High School Speech Association to award the Donovan Cummings' Service Above Self Award to such a deserving coach and colleague.

Benjamin Cummings
Secretary/Webmaster
CHSSA

