

# Donovan Cummings Service Above Self Award

## 2014 Recipient Hoon Ko



Each year the prestigious Donovan Cummings Service Above Self Award is given to someone who has gone above and beyond in service to others in the speech and debate community. Donovan Cummings was a deeply dedicated educator whose career was devoted in service to his students at Edison, Stagg and Franklin high schools in Stockton, the Migrant Ed students in San Joaquin County and the CHSSA Council from 1963-2008. When Cummings' life service came to an end in 2010, the California High School Association honored him with this award in his name in recognition of his passion for service to others.

This year the organization is honoring Hoon Ko with the 2014 Service Above Self Award. Hoon has devoted countless hours of coaching, advising and inspiring both novice and experienced students and coaches throughout California. This is truly remarkable when we consider that Hoon works in the technology field and not the classroom. All of Hoon's work is done as a volunteer, driven by his passion for forensics and the life-

long positive impacts it has on all those involved in it.

This drive began as a student at Fremont High School in Sunnyvale, one of the top schools nationwide in forensics. His teacher and coach was Carmendale Fernandez, a National Hall of Fame coach and one of the co-founders of the California High School Speech Association. Hoon competed in Original Oratory, Extemporaneous, Policy, and LD as a student, where he learned how to communicate with an audience first hand and speak persuasively. Who would have imagined at that time that Hoon himself would eventually work with students as a coach of record at Monta Vista, Cupertino, Homestead, Los Gatos, Gunn and Sacred Heart Prep high schools. Aaron Blumenthal, Los Gatos '04, states "Hoon Ko taught me everything I know about debate. When I was a little sophomore devastated about my repeated losses to older teams, Hoon was my guiding light – reassuring me that I would improve. His patience was an inexhaustible resource; he was willing to indulge my over-exuberance to practice ceaselessly for hours on end. And when I had trouble in my personal life, Hoon was always willing to lend a sympathetic ear. Hoon is an incredible coach, an amazing support system, and a great friend. This award could not go to a more deserving person." Hoon has also been a resource for debaters at other high schools such as Bellarmine, and Leland. According to Adam Lauridsen, Bellarmine graduate, "Over my years of competing, Hoon was an irreplaceable pillar in the support network that helped me so much. Hoon dives into coaching with an energy and generosity that is possible only when something is a passion, not just a job. He is unshakably positive and those around him can't help but be infected by his enthusiasm and dedication. While I was a student, he was always available to mull over new arguments or hear practice speeches. As I returned to the event after graduation as a judge and a coach, I gained an even deeper appreciation for Hoon's commitment to speech and debate as, not just as an academic activity, but as a life lesson. There are generations of lawyers, doctors, scientists, teachers, journalists and business people who put to use every day, the skills that Hoon passed on and helped them perfect. I know, because I'm one of them." Fellow Bellarmine alum, Brad Simmons adds, "Hoon is humble, self-deprecating and understated. He would never tell anyone about his academic or professional credentials. What matters most to him is helping students achieve their potential. That is his clear priority." Jackie Young, Leland '07, agrees, "Mr. Ko's best quality is his relentless and seamless ability to bring out the best in his students. Not just on a competitive level, but he brings out our best, as individuals. He teaches sportsmanship, respect, honor, teamwork, empathy and so on. He believes in students before students believe in themselves."



Hoon's coaching career began in 1993 when he was judging at a tournament as a favor for a friend of his mother's. He began a conversation with Sharon Prefontaine, then coach at Monta Vista-Cupertino and currently the California High School Speech Association President. Hoon expressed an interest in coaching and decided to give it a try at Sharon's invitation. Sharon Prefontaine states "A hallmark of his coaching style was understanding that it was the kids who won, not him. He is honest, ethical and asks for no glory or attention for himself. He has started programs at many schools, assisted new coaches, and keeps in touch with the many students he has worked with." He coached at Monta Vista until 1995 when he moved to Homestead High School, in the same school district, whose speech and debate program was struggling. It was only a few years later when students from that Homestead High School team closed out policy debate at the state tournament. Miki Heller, Homestead

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'03 expresses her appreciation for Hoon's help, "What strikes me most about Hoon is his commitment. He works exceptionally hard for his students at great personal expense – both in time and money. He is not only committed to our success in debate rounds, but also in life; he has kept in better touch with us than any of our high school teachers or college professors."

In addition to coaching students, Hoon has also had a great positive impact on the speech and debate community in Northern California. There is no way to measure the number of speech and debate teams that have started or continued because of Hoon's efforts. He calls, emails and visits schools to communicate with administration and parents to offer help and support in their efforts to establish and/or sustain forensic programs. Hoon is always ready to give advice on every area of running a team. Archbishop Mitty H.S.'s new coach Karen Joshi says "Hoon has consistently made himself available to answer my questions, and as a new coach, I couldn't have gotten through this year without him. If he doesn't know the answer to my question, he will always get back to me or point me in another helpful direction. The time he puts into his position as president is inspiring, and I'm incredibly thankful for his support as a leader and friend." And Karen's words are echoed by coaches and former students alike. There is no better tribute to Hoon than the words of those who have had the opportunity to work with him over the years.

Hoon is also held in high regard by experienced coaches in the community as well. According to Chris Wolfe of Bellarmine, "Hoon is the most selfless coach I know. He has demonstrated his love of speech and debate by working tirelessly in the CFL and CHSSA to support the integrity of the activity even over his own programs. Hoon really believe in the power of the activity to change lives for the better and devotes all of his coaching to that end. Above and beyond all that he is a great friend." Tim Case of Presentation expresses these sentiments as well, "Hoon is one of the most dedicated coaches I have ever met. There are not too many people who, while keeping a full time job in the tech industry, would be so giving of themselves to their students and to the league they compete in. I'm not sure he really ever takes a break. In the eight years I have known Hoon, he has been at every meeting, every tournament where his kids are competing, and has served the league in every capacity possible, including as its current President. His students are lucky to have his mentoring and guidance and I am very fortunate to have him as a colleague, mentor and friend." In addition, Janet Willford of San Ramon Valley High School speaks to Hoon's commitment to the community, "I am constantly impressed with his professional demeanor. He is excellent with all types of people and personalities. In addition, I am truly amazed by his passion for speech and debate. When there is strife between our member coaches, his skills of diplomacy always manage to smooth over the squabbling and seek out a fair solution for all parties. He is the quintessential leader." CFL Coach and CHSSA Hall of Fame Member, Sharon Smith writes, "Hoon is truly dedicated to the activity and the students. He gives his time, often without any kind of compensation, simply because he believes in what speech and debate can do for kids. He dreams of football players who debate. He sees this as the image of every day people taking on what some people think is only for the elite, and discovering that they can do it--and that they like it. Hoon has such faith. He also gives himself to bringing new schools into speech and debate. He is the strong arm that new coaches lean on as they establish their programs. He is the strong heart that always believes that every obstacle can be overcome. He is the caring mind that makes sure every coach, experienced and new alike, knows exactly what's going on and what to expect. (I love his information emails!)"



Hoon's patience, teaching abilities and dedication are rare finds and he has touched the lives of many students in ways no other teacher could. He is indeed a worthy recipient of the Donovan Cummings Service Above Self Award.