

KARSON KALASHIAN

2018 Donovan Cummings
Service-Above-Self Winner



In the Southern Valley Forensics League, we have a phrase that gets deployed with precise regularity in our tabrooms throughout the year: *'Karsoning.'*

A verb of unidentified origin, to Karson is to care about all things forensics, no matter how minute, to an obsessively passionate degree. Are you standing over round 3 policy results (even when you have no entries in policy), mulling and inferring who will hit in the next few rounds? *That's Karsoning.* Are you sitting in tab, multiple sheets of paper splayed out in front of you, drawing up a multi-year plan for league and team growth? *You're Karsoning.* Do you ever find yourself sitting with your fellow forensics fanatics, reminiscing about notable rounds of yore, reliving those great moments and figuring out how you can make sure future students have the same opportunities and experiences? *You, my friend, are Karsoning.* While this neologism may initially seem critical, it was actually born entirely out of love



and respect for one of the most caring and generous advocates for this activity we know: Karson Kalashian.

To serve beyond ourselves is something many strive to do, but that kind of service is the epitome of who Karson is. While one could outline all of Karson's coaching successes (of which there are many), what truly defines Karson Kalashian is his character and drive to constantly serve our most marginalized populations. At his core, Karson believes that forensics matters and it absolutely should be accessible to every student in California, regardless of their background or circumstances. And for him, it's not just talk. Throughout his entire career, Karson has worked tirelessly to build large, successful, and incredibly inclusive programs at schools with high migrant, high poverty populations. Literally thousands of young people from the southern Central Valley have had the chance to travel and go to the world's best colleges directly because of the guidance, mentorship, and opportunities that Karson worked unremittingly to provide.

This fundamental dedication to providing a platform for those whose voices deserve elevation is not just limited to Karson's work as a coach. For almost a decade, Karson has tirelessly advocated on the California State Speech Council for equality in opportunity for all students across our state.

His belief that the California High School Speech Association is an equalizer for all students, regardless of their backgrounds, is mirrored in every comment he makes and every piece of legislation he crafts. Always there to volunteer to put in the work necessary to make opportunity a reality, Karson has been a defining voice and advocate through his service to all of us in the speech and debate community.

One thing I have always deeply admired about Karson is the acceptance and respect he shows everyone he encounters, regardless of what differences or unique challenges they face. Karson's message is clear: we each have our burdens, but speech and debate is the path through which our voices can achieve true empowerment. That message is one that is deeply personal for Karson because of his own background, where speech and debate gave him his voice, so that philosophy is no small part of what guides him in how he approaches every aspect of this activity to this day.

Guided by optimism, dedication, and a fundamental belief in the goodness and importance of forensics, we all should hope to be a little more like Karson.

I know I do.

Written by Angelique Ronald