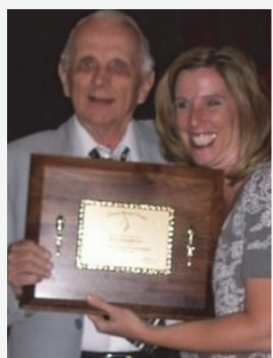


Donovan Cummings Service Above Self Award

2011 Recipient Ron Underwood



The California High School Speech Association is privileged to name Ron Underwood as this year's Donovan Cummings: Service Above Self Award recipient. Ron began his speech career as a team debater under the tutelage of CHSSA's first president Edna Spelts. Upon earning his teaching credential in 1963, he began teaching at Downey High where he succeeded his coach at his alma mater. He worked at Downey before moving to Beyer High School, where he taught and coached for thirty-three years until retirement in 2005.

In 2009, Ron was awarded NFL's second ever 9th diamond having earned over 42,000 NFL coaching points — the highest in NFL history and a testament to his many years of service and dedication to his students. When asked, after forty-two years of high school speech, if he had any philosophy that guided him along the way, he responded, "As much speech opportunity for as many as possible. I was never one to run a 'star-only' program. By serving as many as possible, I probably sacrificed time that

could have been spent getting a few 'stars' to shine even brighter. But, I feel that speech education has so much to offer that I always wanted to make it available to as many as possible."

During his over forty year speech career Ron has served as YFL president, vice president and treasurer. For CHSSA he served nineteen years as area II chairman, three years as vice-president activities and as curriculum representative and representative at large and was nominated by Donovan Cummings to follow him as CHSSA historian after Donovan's retirement in 2008.

Ron's love of speech and his commitment to service is personified in the work that he did in crafting CHSSA's 50th Anniversary book. Ron spent over a year gathering pictures and anecdotes, proofreading and writing so that CHSSA could have a record of the hard work, dedication and accomplishments of its students and coaches. Ron continues to serve as CHSSA Historian and continues to develop ways to recognize and record the great accomplishments of our students and coaches.

Hall of Fame member and friend, Karen Meredith writes of Ron, "When I was a student in the YFL, I was slightly afraid of Ron and certainly in awe of what his team could do—in debate they were the arch nemesis. When I became a coach, I began to appreciate the skills that Ron possessed. I began to realize how deeply he cared about his students and how much he believed in forensics. When I was Area Chair and having to help host State in Sacramento, I was glad that Ron was VP Activities. He taught me much about running a smooth operation and one that was on-time, come hell or high water! Not many really understand the commitment that takes. When I was VP Activities and hosting State at Delta, once again, Ron was a huge help. He cares deeply, even though he really is quite modest, for his students, for this activity we do, but most of all, he cares for Sharon, who has never wavered. I am truly in awe of how long he has not just "lasted" but continued to have the same unwavering commitment to speech, the same enthusiasm, the optimism in the face of challenges that have turned so many off to, or burnt out from, this activity."

Hall of Fame Coach, and Former CHSSA President, John Cardoza writes, "Ron Underwood epitomizes the best of the teaching profession: a gentleman of humility whose devotion and dedication to education is known best through the successes of his students. That he is retired -- and has been retired for many years -- is a matter of speculation and confusion because he continues to work tirelessly for the activity which he clearly loves: competitive speech and debate. His many years of public service to CHSSA, the YFL, the SVFL, and the NFL are well known. But it is his quiet manner of mentoring other teachers which should garner the greater kudos: those who are still "in the field" and the students they teach are all the better for his wisdom, his experience, and his example.

Yes, there are anecdotes which would illuminate the dubiously humorous moments in his teaching career (the night a Cat Woman waitress crawled on his restaurant table and began munching on a steak he complained was too rare, for example), but to truly humanize a man who is a "living legend" one only needs to meet him. He is personable, encouraging, supportive; he is stern, demanding, and exacting; he is compassionate, caring, and considerate. He is a teacher above all others -- what more needs to be said?"

