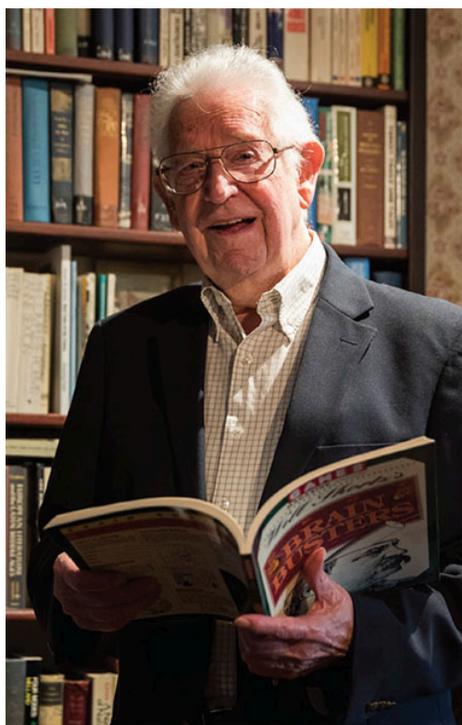


Neil Warren - Legendary Debate Coach

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At 90, College of Eastern Utah's legendary debate coach Neil Warren, still misses teaching every day. "If it wasn't for my macular degeneration eye problem, I probably still would be teaching a class every semester, he quipped, "I enjoyed my life in the education world." Warren's memory is like a walking encyclopedia as he fondly remembers his teachers, colleagues and students who impacted his 43.5-year teaching career.

Warren lives in his hometown of Price, Utah, with his wife Ora, whom he married 70 years ago when he was 19 and a sophomore at Carbon College.

His father worked in road construction, so the family moved to wherever the jobs were located. "We lived in Logan, Randolph, Delta, Loa, Hurricane, Washington, Moab, Salina, Charleston, Wendover, Green River, Moroni and Wendover," he said.

He attended two or sometimes three different schools each year and it was always a challenge to keep up with his education. "Traveling that much was an education itself and it taught me to adjust to circumstances and people. It also taught me how to make friends easily."

By the time he entered junior high, his parents had settled in Price and Warren enrolled in Price Junior High School. He loved the old building and his years there.

The memories that stick in his mind include his seventh grade English teacher and all students being herded into the gymnasium to hear President Franklin Roosevelt's radio speech declaring war on Japan. Track, football, boxing, basketball, plays and a Dorothy Brown musical also are part of his memories.

"When I entered Carbon High School, I wanted to do everything . . . and they let me," he said. After sustaining a broken arm in football, his interests turned to theater, choir, speech and debate where he excelled in each. He was part of the newspaper and yearbook programs, appeared in assemblies, homecoming, special programs at CHS and in the community, plus sprinted in the 100- and 200-yard dashes and leaped in the high jump.

He was president of the Senate club, awarded the meritorious achievement award (most participation in co- and extra-curricular activities) in high school and college where he continued chasing the arts.

Since Carbon High School and Carbon College shared the same campus, it was an easy transition for him to stay home when enrolling in college and pick up where he left off. As a freshman at CC, he held the leads in many plays, qualified for the national junior college debate championship, elected president of the International Relations Club and edited the 1949 yearbook.

Warren wanted to become an attorney, but decided it was financially out of the question. His next choice was a civil engineer because he had taken most of the math classes. Then he spent a summer working for the Bureau of Reclamation carrying a transit in the Uintah Mountains. It was that juncture in his life when he decided to continue in the performing in the arts.

After earning an academic scholarship to the University of Utah in speech and drama, he majored in broadcasting, radio and TV, being the voice of KUER Radio. He still had the bug to appear in plays so his favorite U of U professor, C. Lowell Lees Ph.D., cast him in touring and summer-festival plays.

College was expensive, and Warren remembers working jobs at the Golden Rule Men's Clothing Store where he learned to cuff men's trousers, a meat packing plant, Carpenter Paper Company, a night clerk at Belvedere Hotel, truck driver for W.W. Clyde Construction and night watchman for the First Security Bank.

By 1952, the Korean War was in its second year and Warren was inducted to serve basic training and signal school at San Luis Obispo, California. At that time, all soldiers were in a pipeline to Korea.

Because he was the top student in his class, he was sent to headquarters to see if he could be retained at the camp as an instructor in the school.

Headquarters had a different idea; they pulled him from the pipeline and assigned him a job in Battalion Headquarters. "Ora and I loved living there because of the beautiful beaches, mild climate and no outside distractions."

His next assignment was in San Antonio, Texas, Fourth Army Headquarters. Nine months later, he was honorably discharged as a staff sergeant with medals and a letter of recommendation that helped him get a direct commission in the National Guard. He moved from second lieutenant to first lieutenant to acting captain. He served as company commander of Company "A" of the 1457 Engineer Battalion.

After his discharge, the Warrens returned to SLC where Neil started graduate work in fine arts at the U of U. Back in his hometown of Price, his father became ill and would not move to SLC so Neil could help take care of him. The Warrens moved home to help.

While in Price, CC President Aaron Jones found Neil and asked him if he ever thought about teaching. Jones told him that he voted with the faculty to name Warren and Henry Rachele as the two most likely students to succeed out of their graduation class. He asked Warren to come home and succeed here. "Try it," he said, "you might like it."

Warren liked it and for the next 43.5 years, all at the college except two years at the high school, one year

at the U of U and one year at the University of Arizona, he taught thousands of students.

His repertoire of classes included interpersonal communication, public speaking, group communication, debate and forensics, parliamentary speaking, intro to theatre, acting, theatre production, readers theatre, voice improvement, makeup, stagecraft, storytelling, English, American lit, the novel, poetry, Shakespeare and sociology.

He also taught in a master's teaching program on the reservation at Ganado where he got a crash course in Navajo and Hopi cultures, including the famous snake dance at Second Mesa.

When Neil was hired to teach at the college, Elmo Geary was the drama director, and Neil offered to build scenery for "Oklahoma" in the Price Civic Auditorium because the college did not have a theatre at that time.

Quickly the two became best friends and collaborated to organize a community theatre program which continues to produce a production each year. Geary thought the community theatre idea would fly because they could meet three needs: a facility, money and professional help.

Warren figures he has directed and/or performed in 130 theatrical productions throughout his career. However, his favorite performances were when he played professor Henry Higgins in "My Fair Lady" and Polonius in "Hamlet" in Price; and Mortimore in "Arsenic and Old Lace" at the U of U.

It was during this time that Warren set up his career to be the director of the best two-year college debate program in Utah and the United States. He became a legend of sorts in the forensics world, but it came at a personal cost.

"My first year, we were given \$200 to fund the debate program. We sold cookies, sponsored dances and a Las Vegas Night to earn extra money. I had a station wagon and we used my car to take the students to five tournaments that year.

"We would often leave after classes on Thursday, drive all night and compete Friday through Sunday. After the tournament, we would load everyone into my car, and drive all night so everyone (including myself) could be in our Monday morning classes," he said.

One of his first debaters in 1960 was the late Val Halamandaris, who was the former director of the National Council on Aging in Washington, D.C. He was one of the four Carbon College students who qualified for nationals in Hutchinson, Kansas.

Warren did not have a travel budget and asked Pres. Claude Burtenshaw to fund the competition. The president would not agree to the college funding so Warren asked if the students paid their own way, would he let them attend? Shaking his head yes, Burtenshaw agreed to let four students go along with their coach.

Halamandaris' dad lent the squad his car to drive to Kansas while Warren agreed to pay for gas, lodging and tournament fees. The students had to pay their meals. "Everyone did well with Val and Mike Orphanakis losing in the final round to the champions. Julie Olsea placed in extemporaneous and Sandra Thomas just missed the finals of oratory. I was elected vice president of Phi Rho Pi's Region 3," he said.

Under his expertise, CEU's debate program continued to grow and get better every year. They were invited to the national cross-examination debate championship at George Mason University in Virginia and placed third with one team. They returned the next year with two teams and placed first and fifth.

CEU was the perennial champs in the regional junior college ranks, but also did well at the junior level in senior tournaments. CEU won the U of U's Great Salt Lake Tournament, Arizona State Tournament and Southern Utah University Tournament many times.

Warren's debaters won 54 trophies in 1967, which was a record they thought would last. It was dwarfed in 1992 when the squad won 272 trophies and in '93, they won 273 trophies. The individual trophies were kept by the students and the team sweepstakes trophies and plaques are crowded in a display case in the Western Instructional Building.

If one adds all of Warren's achievements and awards as a coach, they include 24-national-championship-first-place awards, four-second places and 12-third places. He said all his student successes could not have happened without the supportive administration, faculty, staff and community.

His service to the National College Speech Association includes regional governor, membership vice president, vice president and national president. He spent his final 15 years as comptroller, ombudsman and archivist.

He described two elements that made his program successful: the first is to love what you do because he did. "It must be a challenging and worthwhile activity, one that will hold your interest and make you feel good."

The second element was to love the students. "Each one of these young people who come under your direction are special, they are different, but full of potential. Some need to be treated gently while others need some degree of discipline. If you love your students, you will help them learn to do research, to understand and organize material and present their materials to an audience. Remember to help them, not to do the work for them. This is their opportunity to learn and grow.

"I call the next step 'expectation.' We trust the students, we encourage them, we expect them to win. Somehow that converts to confidence, an essential ingredient for a performance."

Awards were not only won by Warren's students. His CV is filled with page after page of local, state and national awards including Price Junior Chamber of Commerce "Distinguished Service Award, The U of U Outstanding Service Award, Intermountain Region Phi Rho Pi "Speech Teacher and Debate Coach of the Year," Weber State University, Southern Utah University Western Debate Conference and California State Forensics Association each named him "Debate Coach of the Year."

CEU awards included "Outstanding Achievement and Quality Teaching," "Exceptional Community Service," Teacher of the Year," and "Upon Their Shoulders."

The Utah Board of Regents presented Warren with the "Regents Award for Excellence in Teaching," the Utah American Federation of Teachers "Community College Teacher of the Year" and the Utah State Board of Education "Recognition for Quality Teaching."

Many teachers get burned out, but Warren said he was too busy to get burned out. He admits everything has its limits, but he loved what he did every day.

"I'm concerned that some teachers seem more interested in themselves rather than their students. They need to leave their egos behind, be fully prepared, respect their students and talk honestly and directly to them," he said.

Warren admitted to not having many regrets in his life. However, he did feel remorse after Carbon College and CEU won 24-national-first-place championships, four-second place and 12-third-place championships, plus all the other awards and honors, and the college

unceremoniously terminated the program in 2002. "That broke my heart," he said.

Recently, Warren's grandson asked his grandpa if he did anything special before he retired. Always prepared, Warren answered, "I was a hometown boy who stayed home, but kept very busy.

"I spent a good deal of my life going to schools and taking workshops to be better prepared to be a teacher, taught a heavy teaching load, coached debaters in the afternoon and traveled them all over the nation on long weekends, spent nights practicing plays and building scenery, spent time with meaningful organizations, enjoyed every day I went to work, became a world traveler and then sat back fondly remembering all my colleagues and the wonderful young people it was my privilege to know and love. Is that special?"

"Distinguished" somehow does not do justice to describe the legend Neil Warren is to Carbon College and College of Eastern Utah. All those students who were lucky enough to have Warren as their teacher, mentor, coach and friend, know how truly distinguished he really is.

~ *Susan Polster*