The Saddleback Speech and Debate Team started its competitive season last weekend, attending the first annual Crossman Invitational Tournament at El Camino College. Coach and Co-Director of Forensics, Shawn O’Rourke stated, “This is a rebuilding year for the team. Most of last year’s squad have transferred on to four-year programs – we currently have three alums from the program competing for Concordia University with speech and debate scholarships. Since the team is full of new recruits we decided only to bring 5 students to this first tournament and plan to unleash the full squad in a few weeks at the Watson Lancer Invitational.”

Despite the small squad the team had an excellent opening tournament. New recruit, Joseph Hana received second place in Novice Impromptu Speaking. The event, which requires the student to create an original 5 minute speech with 2 minutes of preparation, was the largest at the Crossman. Hana had to compete against 37 other students in the first 3 preliminary rounds, and then 7 of the tournament’s top competitors in the final round. Hana, in addition to being the current president of the Accounting Society at Saddleback, was also elected the speech team’s current Historian. Lucas Ochoa, the team’s other Co-Director stated, “We are incredibly proud of Joe. Great way to start the semester! We are also thrilled with the performance of the students who attended the tournament. They competed with honor and represented the college with dignity. I am very excited for what the future holds for our team.”

O’Rourke continued, “The tournament was also notable as we are saying goodbye to Jack McMenamin who competed for the last time with Saddleback College.” Jack was a returning member of the squad who competed last year at the state and national level, winning multiple awards in debate and individual events, and who was chosen to represent the team at the Phi Rho Pi National Tournament held in Washington D.C. He has been accepted and has begun attending University of California, Irvine where he is majoring in Cognitive Sciences and hopes to help start a speech and debate team there.

When asked about his time with the team Jack wrote:

Forensics [Speech and debate] turned my college life on its head and sent me in a positive direction like I didn’t think was possible. Suddenly I was so much more interested in being a better student since I was so involved on campus and in the community. The friends I’ve made on the team are the best friends I’ve had in years. All in all forensics at Saddleback was one of the greatest learning experiences of my life, and a ton of fun to boot.

Also in attendance at the Joel Tournament were Joel Reise, James Geraghty, and Vincent Garduno. Reise, the current vice president of the team, also competed at the state and national tournaments last year and looks forward to another rewarding year with the program. Geraghty and Garduno, both veterans of the Armed Forces, are relative new-comers to the team but definitely hit the ground running. “We expect great things from them in the months ahead,” said coach, Heidi Ochoa.

Helping out with tournament was former competitor, Tyler Kline. Kline is a veteran of Saddleback Team who along with his partner, Michael Prince, won the first gold medal in debate at a national tournament in Saddleback’s history back when he was a competitor. He continued his career with the team, becoming a multiple award-winning state and national champion. He is currently finishing up his A.A. in Speech at Saddleback and has volunteered to help peer coach the new students. He stated, “Speech and debate changed my life. I wasn’t sure what I wanted to do with my life but then I was recruited by the coaches who saw something in me. Now my plan is to transfer to a 4-program, and ultimately get an M.A. in Communication Studies so that I can come back to Saddleback and be a coach and professor.”
O’Rourke concluded by saying that, “Joe’s success, Jack’s transferring, and Tyler’s helping out the team, represent many of the key elements that make our team successful. The coaches – Heidi, Lucas, myself and our two part-timers, Dana-Jean Smith and Dawne Mclure – are exceptionally excited for what the year has in store and are proud to be part of a program that helps student’s achieve their goals while furthering their education!”