Saddleback’s Speech & Debate Team Takes First in the American Readers Theatre Association Championship

On the weekend of May 5th and 6th, Saddleback College capped off the speech season by once again making history. Mt. San Antonio College hosted the premier speech tournament of the year called, The American Readers Theatre Association (ARTA) Championship. Saddleback entered two shows into this year’s tournament, *Mouth of the Lion* and *Bellicose*. *Mouth of the Lion* was directed by Co-Director Larry Radden and *Bellicose* was directed by coach, Lucas Ochoa. *Bellicose* won the Best Ensemble award which was awarded to the theatre that had the best chemistry or unity on stage. *Bellicose* was also awarded the Audience Award which is given to the theatre according to the audience’s preference in the Final Round. Finally, *Bellicose* took 1st place and was awarded the ARTA Championship. *Bellicose* Readers Theatre starred: Carolina Beyer-Flores, Melissa Armstrong, Cece Melody and Solana Prince. *Mouth of the Lion* placed 4th overall and garnered a Best Special Sound Effect Award. *Mouth of the Lion* was also recognized in an acting category by a nomination for Best Actor: Jackson Spencer. *Mouth of the Lion* Readers Theatre starred: Olivia Noceda, Dennis Meador and Jackson Spencer.

ARTA, a prestigious tournament, invites the best theatres from across the country to compete in front of professional actors, educators, Hollywood industry officials and other entertainment members. Each theatre must not exceed 25 minutes in length and must have a minimum of 3 students. Each show contains a theme and several components that complement the direction and/or vision of the director. The script is then used by the actors through blocking, singing and acting to demonstrate a cohesive piece of art. It is an extremely difficult but rewarding tournament for the students and coaches because of the celebration of different themes through performance.

In the forensics world, placing (and winning) in Readers Theatre is an incredible feat as it is one of the most difficult speaking genres to advance and it requires more work and patience than any other event. Also, coaches directing Readers Theatre and students performing in them
invest an additional 20-30 hours a week for approximately 3 months to their already heavy rehearsal and tournament work load. The Saddleback Team is extremely proud that their efforts were rewarded at not one but three tournaments, two of which were of national caliber.

Each theatre provided unique and interesting themes that proved to be well received by the audience and judges. *Mouth of the Lion*, directed by Larry Radden, explored the theme of work related accidents and how employers and victims respond to these unfortunate incidents. Larry’s show provided a rich, balanced and thought provoking lens to view and ask, “Are we truly safe at work and if not, what do we do about it?” The second show, *Bellicose*, directed by Lucas Ochoa, offered compelling and frightening information on the current rise of female gang violence in the United States. *Bellicose* earned several nominations including two best Actress Nominations for Carolina Beyer-Flores and Solana Price. *Bellicose* also earned a Best Blocking nomination.

Co-Director Larry Radden says, “The Saddleback Forensics team and coaches are pleased to have ended the season with the most amazing experience. We advanced two readers theatres to the Final Round at ARTA. I am so proud of all seven cast members who are talented, hardworking and focused. In addition, I’m so happy for my colleague and good friend Lucas Ochoa. His first place award winning success was a combination of the perfect recipe; an amazing coach, a phenomenal script, incredible blocking and a talented cast of performers who sing like angels.”

Coach Lucas Ochoa said, “I am so proud of the four young women who dedicated themselves to *Bellicose*. There are no words to describe the look on their faces when they won first place. I am deeply honored to have directed this show and I will never forget the impact these four women made on my life. This was truly the best year I have ever had as a coach. I’m happy to bring home the ARTA championship for Saddleback College and I look forward to creating more art next year. What a gift it was to coach alongside Larry Radden. I’m still learning from Larry and his brilliant direction. I’d also like to extend a huge thank you to Saddleback Popular Music faculty Ariel Alexander for helping with the singing and Saddleback Acting faculty Bill McGuire for his stage combat. I look forward to future collaborations.”

Dr. Tod Burnett, president of Saddleback College, stated, “Once again our forensics team has demonstrated an enormous amount of talent and I commend our students for this great achievement. Readers Theatre is a difficult event that requires skill and tremendous hard work. Put simply, doing well in this category is difficult; winning an award is something few teams enjoy. Congratulations to our students for their truly impressive accomplishment.”

Bart McHenry, Dean of Fine Arts and Media Technology, stated, “I am very proud of our Readers Theatre students and coaches. The success from their hard work is a highlight in the Division of Fine Arts and Media Technology this year. I encourage future students to take advantage of our outstanding coaches and join next year’s team.”
The forensics team would go nowhere if it wasn't for the support of President Tod Burnett, Dean Bart McHenry, Speech Department Chair Kimberly Stankovich, Associated Student Government (ASG), and our "chief organizers" Jackie Zimbalist and Joyce Speakman.

The Saddleback Forensics Team started in the 1970s and prides itself on offering students the ability to create innovative arguments for future writing and speaking engagements to strengthen their critical thinking skills and to better communicate with others. On the forensics team, students write, rehearse, and perform at 6-7 tournaments against students from Universities and Community Colleges to qualify for the national tournament. The students representing Saddleback at the national tournament have placed above several competitors representing institutions throughout the year, including: Concordia University, Point Loma, California State University, Los Angeles, California State University, Long Beach, and UCLA.

Located in Mission Viejo, Saddleback College provides quality higher education and training to the greater south Orange County community. Having served more than 500,000 students since 1968, Saddleback College offers over 300 degree and certificate programs to help students reach their personal, career, and educational goals. For more information, please visit www.saddleback.edu and for Fine Arts information, please visit www.saddleback.edu/arts.

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