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Editors' Note

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Editor's Note

Enjoying the Song, Toasting the Singer

The 1982 DSR-TKA national tournament at Texas Tech University will always hold a special place in my heart. My Ball State University teammates and I, with our coaches, Vicki Karns and Keith Semmel, loaded a mammoth RV and headed out of Muncie toward Lubbock. It would prove to be the only trip in 37 years of forensic travel to involve the unfortunate pairing of those two consonants, *R* and *V*. While most of the memories of that weekend have mercifully faded, a part lingers and inspires to this day.

The tournament banquet featured a guest speaker, former DePauw University debater Vernon Jordan. In the years following his competition days, Jordan had distinguished himself as an attorney and leader in the civil rights movement. He had served as the president of the National Urban League from 1971-1981. In May of 1980, Jordan was shot in Fort Wayne, Indiana, by a white supremacist, serial killer Joseph Paul Franklin. Jordan survived. His hospital visit from President Jimmy Carter became the first news story covered by a startup news organization called CNN. In March of 1982, he remarked to the forensic assembly that he was looking forward to returning to the private practice of law. The “privacy” would be short-lived, as Jordan would distinguish himself in several ways: as an award-winning author, tireless public servant, civil rights icon and a member of the Clinton transition team and then private counsel to President Clinton.

Vernon Jordan's distinct booming bass voice loomed nearly as large as his presence at the front of the banquet hall. He possessed the rhythmic inspirational cadence of so many of his colleagues in the movement, most famously Dr. King himself. But it was his message that challenged me to the core—a thesis that I have repeated in front of every public speaking class that I have taught over the past three-plus decades. Jordan confronted every speaker in the room with this observation, “It is wonderful that you are all singers, but it is more important that you have a song.”

The metaphor drifted back to me once again as I sat in the closing moments of the awards ceremony at NFA's 2015 national tournament, listening to a beloved leader belting out an old standard. Larry Schnoor is a singer with a song. From the dawn of comprehensive intercollegiate individual events competition in the early 1970's, no voice has proclaimed the value of public speech competition as strongly as his—and it is a note he has held for fifty years. In the early seventies he led a chorus of voices calling for the inclusion of individual events competition in the realm of intercollegiate forensics. In July of 1976, Schnoor was appointed as the chair of the National Individual Events Tournament Committee. In 1978, the AFA's NIET became the second comprehensive national individual events tournament, seven years after the NFA tournament. From 1985 to 1994, he assumed the role of NFA's Vice President for Administration. From 1995 to 2015, he led the NFA serving as its president. Across the wide spectrum of forensic organizations, from the American Forensic Association to the Interstate Oratorical Association, Larry Schnoor has assumed primary positions of leadership. While most

directors of forensics have focused on developing and managing their own programs, Schnoor has seen to the administration of the bigger picture. Without his voice, and those who joined with him, individual events competition would barely be an activity, let alone a career choice. The tune we have so easily inherited was composed through decades of hard work, sacrifice, perseverance and vision.

Effective leadership, like rhetoric itself, calls for a nuanced understanding of people, issues and contexts. Ironically, an activity that develops an advanced understanding of the most human connection, communication, also tends to bring out a disturbing divisiveness in the overly competitive. Larry's personal approach to enhancing relationships among colleagues has served to draw together communities whose natural course is division. Yes, the "Lion of Mankato" can roar in the face of ingratitude, immaturity and incompetence, but his calming, resonant, Minnesota baritone is typically more reminiscent of Keillor than killer. Long before the buzzwords "servant leadership" dominated the motivational speech circuit, and in the hours after the last round had ended, President Schnoor could be observed sweeping up cigarette butts on the sidewalk or handling any number of tasks that most would deem menial. As a leader, Larry knows when to sweep them and when to kick them.

"Menial" is in the eye of the beholder, or more likely in the peripheral vision of the passerby. As one rushes off to the next round, or scurries to see postings, the tasks undertaken to provide these opportunities often go unheralded. The dash to the next round serves as an appropriate metaphor for our activity. We focus so intently on the game that we miss the context. The collection of cigarette butts on the ground means little to the ones who discarded them, but speaks volumes to the host community. Larry understood that. Forensic activity exists within the contexts of departments, colleges, communities, cities and society at large. The game has a larger end in mind. His leadership takes many forms, from participating in hundreds of panels at NCA and other professional organizations to assuming nearly every administrative position in the activity, from presiding over contentious meetings to balancing tight budgets, from mentoring countless coaches to building future leaders. Larry wears many hats- each with style and flair! While many educators have spent careers in forensic service, Larry truly stands alone in dedication to leadership of the larger individual events community.

On the pages of this journal, it is appropriate that we recognize Schnoor's unparalleled contribution as president of the NFA for the past two decades, and salute his accomplishments as an active founder, supporter and developer of individual events competition. We believe it has been a song worth singing. We are forever indebted to, and grateful for the "Roaring Lion of Mankato."

Randy Richardson
Co-Editor