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QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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### **History of High School Debate in Canada**



**Tom Lawson**, a school teacher at Trinity College in Port Hope, Ontario had a vision that our youth needed to be armed with the tools to make them better future leaders.

In 1967, Tom hosted the very first known debate tournament in Canada, bringing together high school students from around the province of Ontario. Looking to the future, he wanted to build a network of debaters across our great country and soon, it gained momentum and provinces were getting behind him to start programming. Today, this event of cultural exchange has become the annual highlight of the Canadian Student Debating Federation ([CSDF](#)).

The 1972 seminar scheduled in Edmonton would see 10 provinces with 10 diverse agendas and growth problems coming out of their ears. Tom affectionately noted that they were a bunch of overworked school teachers involved in financial and legal problems well beyond their capabilities.

The theme for the Edmonton Seminar was to be *the Free Market vs a Planned Economy*, and Tom knew that a public debate between highly informed advocates for both sides would be gold. Advocates for a Planned Economy were easy to draft, but defenders of the Free Market were clearly loathe to debate the issue in public.

In desperation, Tom phoned **Willis McLeese**, a Toronto business man who, he was told, might agree. Tom told him he wanted him to fly to Edmonton, at his own expense (the CSDF was penniless) to defend the Free Market in a public debate followed by questioning from 100 brilliant teenagers from every corner of Canada. Tom's line to Willis was, "If you love kids, you'll do it." Willis came.

Tom will tell you he never forgot that particular debate. There were adults with diametrically opposed views attacking each other's arguments with knowledge, passion, and genuine courtesy. The kids lined up at the mikes for over an hour, made a shambles of the schedule. On the way to the airport an hour later, Willis asked what he could do for the CSDF. Tom's immediate answer was, "We need a treasurer." Willis, without giving it any thought, responded with, "You've got one."

For the next decade, Willis McLeese engineered the CSDF incorporation, taught them how to elect directors and officers, how to conduct businesslike meetings (a huge challenge for them), how to keep minutes, and how to use his office to raise funds. He engineered the better part of \$100,000 annually, and personally pulled the CSDF out of the hole again and again with never failing patience, faith, and generosity.

Annual Seminars followed in a different province each year. The 70's saw the CSDF mushroom to well over 500 schools, involving some 10,000 student debaters, in English French, and Bilingual categories. The CSDF became the catalyst for the revival of educational debate in Canada, not only in every type of school, but in universities and internationally.

**Introducing our  
2022-2023  
Board of Directors**

Robert McLeese  
James Gardner  
Lisa McLeese  
Nikhil Gowd  
Megan Parry  
Chris George

**CONTACT  
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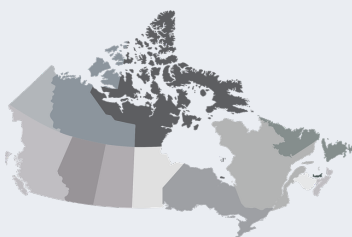
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**Land  
Acknowledgement**

*The Speech and Debate Canada Foundation's headquarters are located on the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit and the traditional territory of the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Wendat, and the Haudenosaunee. Today Toronto, a city which is also referred to as Tkaronto, is home to many diverse communities of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Peoples from across Turtle Island. We are thankful to live and work on this land.*

Tom tells us it was never easy. Every year was a nail-biter. Then, Tom's 35-year dream was suddenly realized. In 2002, Willis provided close to \$2 million in a fund to ensure that no Canadian student would ever be deprived of the chance to participate in educational debate because of where that student may be attending school.

Tom often wondered what made a man such as Willis McLeese so devoted to the CSDF?

It was not just that he loved young people. It was also his deep commitment to the democratic process, to the importance of listening with an open mind to all sides on every controversial issue, to training our future leaders in the art of civilized disagreement

The Canadian Student Debating Federation, for which Willis McLeese was an Initiator, Mentor, Godfather, and Guide for over 40 years, has made a significant contribution to the quality of public life in Canada. Tom honestly believes that, were it not for Willis, the CSDF would not be in existence today.

**Program Update for this Year**

It has been an exciting start to the school year for everyone across the country, including at Speech and Debate Canada Foundation. Having a new Executive Director who started on September 1<sup>st</sup>, there was a steep learning curve to endure. We were also certainly presented with a lot more challenges given the full return to in class learning across the country and needing to navigate the new direction presented to us.

The first couple of months were faced with hiring new instructors, ensuring they received clean Vulnerable Sector Checks, and pairing them with returning programming from the previous year. Settling on reaching the demand for instructors with the return to in-person activities meant that we had to come up with a plan that would work for everyone. In the end, we settled on our instructors zooming into classrooms under the supervision of a schoolteacher or administrator. To date, this has worked well in everyone's favor and will likely be the way we move forward as we face growth.

Outreach to CSDF member organizations has proved successful to date with programs now in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nova Scotia. We have working agreements with [ADSA](#); [SEDA](#); [ADDEQ](#); [NLSDU](#); and [NSDS](#) to help support the growth of programming within their provinces.

If anyone is interested in what these partnerships look like, please do contact us directly. We are happy to work with CSDF members and all schools across Canada to continue the legacy that Tom Lawson was able to create with the support of Willis McLeese.

Speech and Debate Canada Foundation continues to work towards the advancement of education through extra-curricular activities in schools across Canada.

**2023 Annual National Persuasive Speech Competition**

Speech and Debate Canada Foundation's Second Annual Persuasive Speech Competition. All details related to the event is in the invitation.

A few points to highlight are:

1. Registration Link: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfPKh-WF7CTTQYge1FXW6q7OtST\\_vH0w4cevI7aVLF2qgnCBQ/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfPKh-WF7CTTQYge1FXW6q7OtST_vH0w4cevI7aVLF2qgnCBQ/viewform?usp=sf_link)
2. There are two categories Junior and Senior
3. We are only accepting 3 entries per category per school, coaches please monitor that for us
4. The final prize is \$500 per category with half of that going to the student's charity of choice
5. We will be accepting observers for the final event on **Sunday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023 from Noon to 2:30 Pacific time**

Please contact us if you would like to be sent the official invitation. This year's celebrity judges will be announced by March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023.