

GUEST EDITOR'S FORWARD

by Minh A. Luong, Guest Editor

1999 marks the 20th anniversary of Lincoln-Douglas debate as an National Forensic League event and it seems fitting that we start the year reflecting upon not only the last two decades, but the present state of L-D debate and what lies ahead. In only twenty years, Lincoln-Douglas has become the most popular debate event at the high school level; surpassing established events such as Student Congress and Policy Debate. Despite this spectacular growth, we as a community should be asking ourselves if the event itself has grown commensurately. If I had to ask myself that question, my answer would be no – L-D debate has not matured either in the theoretical or practical sense, especially if we remember the great promise that the event held back in 1979.

At the twenty year mark, we are still struggling with even basic issues such as judging norms, argumentative burdens, and the limited scope of “acceptable philosophies.” Coaches, debaters, and judges argue at tournaments and on the LD-L listserv over structural issues such as the “correct” use of values and criteria, definitions, and observations. These are symptoms of a greater underlying issue – that there is no commonly shared “vision” of L-D debate, and even more problematic, one faction is unwilling to accept the approach of any other. It is this division and its resulting divisiveness that threatens to stunt the growth and development of Lincoln-Douglas debate. This issue has been lamented by numerous coaches in the past, and by Brother Michael Tidd most recently in the November 1998 issue of the Rostrum. His call for “a big tent for L-D debate” represents a good starting point for pulling our community together.

This Lincoln Financial Group L/D issue of the NFL Rostrum represents a renewed call to the forensic community to become more engaged and active in the continued development of Lincoln-Douglas debate. To this end, each of my co-authors are first-time contributors to the Rostrum and they represent a new generation of debate scholars who are interested in seeing Lincoln-Douglas debate evolve. We need new voices and perspectives to join the discussion about the future of this important event and NFL Executive Secretary and Rostrum publisher Jim Copeland is always glad to work with new authors on Rostrum submissions. Also of note is

the National Debate Coaches Association (NDCA) task force on L-D debate, headed by NFL Executive Council Member and NDCA Board Member Glenda Ferguson. She and the members of the task force are gathering instructional materials on L-D debate and assessing the state of L-D development. This effort represents the first serious initiative in a long time and if you have any materials to contribute, please submit them. Ms. Ferguson’s contact information appears on page three of this issue of the Rostrum.

But what drives the success of our activity? Certainly the dedicated instructor/coaches who give up countless after-school hours and weekends, former competitors who give back to the activity by returning as judges or coaches, school administrators who support forensics either as a school-sponsored activity or sanction them as an on-campus club, and the parents who run the booster club and who volunteer to chaperone and/or judge at tournaments. Sometimes forgotten from that list, however, are the folks who financially support our programs whether it be the person who donates a few dollars at one of our car washes or our corporate sponsors who support our national organization, the National Forensic League.

The skills that I developed as a forensic competitor and coach enabled me to enter the realm of corporate consulting where I now work with some of the largest financial institutions in the country. In addition, I provide pro-bono services to non-profit organizations in the area of public relations and fundraising. This combination of experience has given me a unique perspective on corporate partnerships with non-profit organizations.

In an era of ever-shrinking school budgets and increasing expenses, it is not possible for many students to continue their participation in forensics without significant external support. Without the generous support of companies like Lincoln Financial Group, it would be impossible to run the NFL National Tournament without significantly raising membership dues or assessing prohibitively higher tournament fees. In fact, the increased support that Lincoln Financial Group has committed will enable the National Forensic League to continue its mission “Training Youth for Leadership” into the 21st

century.

The fact that the Lincoln-NFL partnership exists is indeed special. Because the skills that speech and debate provide are applicable to so many fields, forensics does not fall into a neat constituent category in the eyes of corporate America. Companies of all sizes are approached by hundreds, if not thousands, of proposals from deserving charities and non-profit organizations for support. The question that each corporate philanthropy committee asks itself is: “Are we serving our constituent communities by supporting this organization?” For companies whose business is national or even international in scope, that question becomes very difficult to answer. Just being a “good cause” is not sufficient anymore – there are many other organizations competing for those same charity dollars. Just as Lincoln Financial Group has made a statement about the type of organization they are by funding the National Forensic League and its mission, the forensic community can make its own statement by expressing its appreciation for the support it receives.

One of America’s premier financial services companies, Lincoln Financial Group is a leading writer of individual annuities, pension products, life insurance and mutual funds. Everyone has to prepare for retirement (or so I hope) and investment is a necessity at some point. Please remember that LFG had a choice of organizations to support and it selected ours—The National Forensic League. When choosing a highly-rated provider of financial services for you and your family, I ask that you keep our partnership in mind.

On a personal note, it has been an honor to serve as the Guest Editor but this issue came together due to the hard work of the authors.

I hope that you find the issues raised in these essays provocative and my co-authors and I invite your responses, either via email or by a Rostrum submission. If we are to maximize the potential of Lincoln-Douglas debate as a pedagogical tool, we all need to recommit to its continued development. A vigorous discussion on fundamental issues would be a start; accepting differences and establishing a common vision for L-D debate would be significant breakthroughs. Let us not wait another twenty years for that to occur.