Ed Panetta, AFA Service Award 2020

It would be impossible to have done something in debate over the last thirty years and not know Ed Panetta. He was one of the glorious generation of debaters and scholars to come out of the University of Massachusetts under Ron Matlon in the early 1980s which have formed the foundation for modern communication studies.

After a successful run as an assistant coach at Wake Forest and the University of Pittsburgh, Ed landed at the moribund University of Georgia debate program in 1987 and went on to develop it into a juggernaut, qualifying 54 teams for the NDT between 1990 and 2015. His teams made it to the late elimination rounds of every national tournament and won the Rex Copeland Award in 2007. In that same year, Ed won the Ross Smith award for outstanding coaching.

In addition to his debate work, Ed has served as a mentor to a generation of forensics coaches. It is hard to find a program where a coach has not spent time with the Georgia Debate Union. As part of his mentorship, Ed has actively engaged in scholarly research and has been one of the greatest supporters of the global community of argumentation scholars. He is a fixture at the biennial AFA’s Alta Argumentation Conference.

In the meantime, Ed provided significant support to the AFA. He has served on virtually every AFA Committee and on the NDT Board of Trustees.

However, one of Ed’s proudest accomplishments have been his support of public debate, often through the CIDD, but also through the George Prison Debate Project and a variety of invitational debates. Ed has believed that debate is fundamentally a communication activity and has worked to be sure that Georgia students have the opportunity to practice their skills in front of live audiences. He has appreciated that debates that are isolated from the larger community are at risk when budget crises occur.

Ed has been a model director and AFA citizen and richly deserves the AFA Distinguished Service Award.