

## *Community Stadium*

### *A College of the Redwoods Success Story*



The first year College of the Redwoods hosted a football team, players faced challenges both on and off the field. “In 1967 we didn’t have a stadium—or any sort of place of our own. No locker room, showers, or training tables—none of the things normally associated with modern sports,” first year player and Humboldt County artist Stock Schlueter remembered. “We practiced at Redwood Acres in the mud and shared four shower heads among forty plus players. We would walk into the showers with all our gear on just to get the mud off, then change into our clothes and dry our gear out at home over our heaters.”

Without a campus stadium the Corsairs also hosted all at-home games at Eureka High School’s Albee stadium where, Schlueter added, players went against each other in the mud and driving rain in a field already chewed up from Eureka High School games. Pre-game discussions and half-time pep talks happened in the school’s boiler room, David Titus, another player, remembered.

Despite these challenges, CR secured some wins their first year and the Corsairs won the state junior college football championship in the fall of 1968. The team won a second championship in 1970, setting off a string of championships that wouldn’t end until 1977.

In 1969, College of the Redwoods finished construction on a field house and players were able to practice inside, though games were still be played at the high school. In the next few years, the school installed a football field, all weather rubberized track, curbing and more, but the facility, still lacking lights and seating, and was far from complete.

In the summer of 1972, Dr. Don Weichert replaced Eugene Portugal as CR’s president, and it wasn’t long before the college’s new top administrator noted that the Corsairs had been forced to play at a neutral field for the state championship because CR lacked adequate facilities. Unfortunately, he also noted, there were no public funds to complete the project. Parents, students, and community members vowed to address the problem.

In the winter of 1972, the Athletic Lighting-Seating Drive was officially sanctioned by the college and original steering committee members Dwight O’Dell, Editor and publisher Humboldt Beacon, Frank Powers Arcata High School assistant Principal, Geddes Harper, Sales Manager Harper Ford, former Eureka City Councilman and well know golfer Cliff Steward and architect Jack Nielsen took the lead.

The group’s vision included powerful lights to illuminate the college’s new field and a new stadium to accommodate 4,000 spectators. The stadium roof deck would cover approximately 70% of the seats and include a 3-section press box-one, electric scoreboard, public restrooms, and a concession stand.

Additional volunteers were recruited to help make the vision a reality and in January 1973, the effort was officially launched when Tony Cline, star defensive end for the Oakland Raiders traveled to Eureka to speak at

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a College of the Redwoods Seating and Lighting Committee's kickoff dinner at OH's Townhouse. Tickets went for ten dollars each, with all proceeds going to seating and lighting fund.

That month, the CR Foundation also received \$200 for stadium seating and lighting from the Harper Ford salespeople, the Mercer-Fraser company pledged all needed black-topping of stadium walkways, the Coca-Cola company agreed to install an electronic scoreboard and Harold Nelson of Eureka Ready-Mix pledged 165 yards of concrete, half of the total needed for light standard footings and foundations.

An "atmosphere of unbridled enthusiasm prevailed" at a February project meeting where Weichert announced that the effort had already garnered almost \$20,000 of \$150,000 needed for the project, including cash, materials, and labor. Local real estate broker Ernest Gray was appointed chair. "We've got many people behind this project and although it will entail a lot of work, it is something that will benefit the entire community when it is completed," noted the new chairperson. The group planned future fundraising efforts, which included square dancing lessons, art auction, bake sale, the sale of CR stocking caps and more. "We also had breakfast at O-H's Towne House," football player Richard Spinas remembered. "O.H. would donate the space, friends and family came. We had siblings and girlfriends serving. Everyone in the community got involved and helped."

This early success gave the committee confidence to move forward and in April, College of the Redwoods borrowed a grader and bulldozer from Eureka schools to start clearing ground for the project. In May, \$1,888 from a benefit dinner was added to the coffers and the CR Associated student body donated \$1,000, the largest contribution ever made by the student body. That month the Kerr Land and Timber Company donated 7,700 board feet of lumber worth about \$2,500 to stadium. The Emmerson Logging Company committed to cutting and planing the lumber and Joe Costa Trucking promised to transport it to the campus.

Building on this success, in June the college sent out 35,000 letters inviting community members to support the CR stadium seating and lighting project. The goal, the letter explained, was to gather the slightly less than \$50,000 needed to complete the project. "Friends of Redwoods everywhere are invited," President Weichert wrote, "to participate in a youth project that encourages a spirit of clean living and fair play—the completion of the College of the Redwoods Community stadium." The turf was in, the letter explained, and the earthmovers had banked the hillside. "NOW," Weichert stressed, "the need is for MORE IN CASH."

And cash came in. Thanks to overwhelming community support, by October the project was done, and College of the Redwoods invited the community to attend the "history making" dedication game on Oct 13. At half-time, President Weichert stood before the packed stadium and paid tribute to the volunteers, business owners and other donors who made the project possible. "Look on the scoreboard," he said. is dedicated to the North Coast community." Leonard Casanova, former Santa Clara football great and coach and official dedication guest also expressed his astonishment at the community's accomplishment, adding "The Impossible Dream is a great theme for this stadium."

The dedication ceremonies included music from four local high school bands, a rendition of the Impossible Dream by the College choir and a performance of "Celebration," an original piece composed by one of CR's newly hired music instructors. At the conclusion of the formal ceremonies, the College of the Redwoods team inaugurated their new stadium by "methodically" dismantling the College of the Siskiyous with a 13-0 victory in front of an estimated 3,500 fans.

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### **And now...**

Over the years, College of the Redwoods has invited local high school football, track, and other teams to use their stadium for bigger events and games. The space has also been used for summer youth soccer clinics, high school graduations and even Relay For Life, a fundraiser for the American Cancer Society. It has become, and will continue to be, an integral part of the campus and Humboldt County community.