

Ernie Steadman

Class of 2010



Ernest "Ernie" Compton Steadman was a 1929 Oroville High School (OHS) graduate, who, among his many achievements, is best known for his part in planning, organizing and constructing Oroville's most outstanding and long-lasting landmark: the Block O on Table Mountain.

Ernie and his brother, Morrow, along with a group of OHS classmates worked for three months to construct the Block O. Ernie and Morrow borrowed a Model T truck from their dad's ranch to haul the cement, sand, rocks and water to the base of the trail leading to the work site on Table Mountain. From there, the building materials were loaded on the backs of the varsity football team and other volunteers. As they climbed the steep trail stooped over under their heavy loads, they had to contend with the elements and the occasional rattlesnake. In all, the boys hauled 108 105-pound bags of cement, 12,000 bags of sand and rocks, and 4,000 gallons of water. The only casualty from this Herculean feat was a borrowed pack horse. After mixing the ingredients at the work site, they poured the concrete in sections around automobile axles, which they had driven into the ground to prevent the O from sliding downhill. When volunteer participation began to slack off before the project was finished, Ernie arranged for girls to serve a picnic lunch at the site. The volunteers returned in force and completed the project in April of 1929. They dedicated the Block O in June, christening it with a bottle of champagne and a rousing speech.

Ernie was a good student, who attended OHS from 1925 to 1929. He excelled at football and started on the varsity team all four years at OHS. He was nicknamed "The Swan" because he was so graceful on the playing field. In the Twenties, he wore a leather helmet without a faceguard, so he broke his nose seven times. Ernie also played basketball. In addition to athletics, he participated in school plays, including the productions of *Neighbors* and *Stray Cats*.

After graduating from OHS, Ernie enrolled in the University of California, Berkeley and majored in agricultural economics. As a college athlete, he played water polo and amateur golf. He was an excellent student and maintained a 4.0 grade point average throughout his four years at Berkley. He graduated in 1934 with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture.

With his college degree in hand, Ernie returned to the family ranch near Oroville to start his life-long career as a farmer. In addition to farming, he performed community service and provided leadership in his career field. His leadership positions included president of the Gridley Rotary Club, director of the California 3rd District Peach Growers Association, and president of the Last Chance Gun Club.