

Bill Talbitzer Class of 2015



Bill Talbitzer was a well-known author and historian who worked in the Oroville area as a sports broadcaster, sports editor of the Oroville Mercury-Register, youth supporter, coach, manager, master of ceremonies, lecturer, story-teller, and publisher. At his retirement roast, he was called, "The Diesel of Journalism."

He was closely linked to Oroville High School (OHS) during the 1950's, 60's and 70's through his visits to campus classes, mentoring local youth, writing OHS sports stories, covering OHS games, emceeding OHS sorts banquets, doing public address for OHS games and being involved in local youth baseball.

In 1954, the senior class at OHS dedicated the school yearbook, The Nugget to Bill with the following quote: "To Bill Talbitzer, an understanding and charitable chronicler of the footsteps of youth, a friend who has given us the inspiration of zeal for fair play, a community leader who has encouraged us with recognitions of our good intentions, we, the senior Class, dedicate the 1954 Nugget."

1958 saw Bill receive the Citizen of the Year Award, presented to him by the Oroville Rotary Club for his work with Oroville area youth.

In 1959, Bill was awarded the coveted Plaque for Public Service for his work with OHS kids by Eagles Aerie 196. The award had only been given 3 times over the previous 8 years. The article in the Mercury-register, written by Eagles secretary Vern Tannehill stated, "We make this award only when we feel there is someone who merits it. It is not a periodic thing, let's say, where someone has to be found every year. Bill was chosen primarily for his outstanding work with the school, the kids, and their sports program. We feel he richly deserves it."

In 1963, Bill brought television celebrity Michael Landon of Bonanza to town to meet Jimmy Hastie, OHS basketball player who had cancer. OHS dedicated the 1963 hoops season to Jimmy. Michael Landon remained in town to serve as Grand Marshal of the Feather Fiesta Days parade.

The Sixties also saw Bill make a memorable visit to the OHS journalism class and it was remembered by then student Michael Schleef as, "He had us rolling under the desks as his humor was just so great. A little rough around the edges, but his knowledge, if we would pay attention, was unbelievable. He would teach us tips on what to look for in an interview and above all, he taught us not to be scared of the person we were interviewing." On another classroom visit, Bill advised students to, "Save your notes."

David Frank, OHS 1959, recalls, "When I was in the 5th or 6th grade, I was walking down the street one day and Bill came out of his office and took my picture. He then proceeded to interview me. A few days later, the picture appeared in the Mercury with a few nice words. I still have his articles in my scrapbook."

Dean Andoe, OHS 1957, recalls, "Bill touched my life in a special way and I was not the only Oroville "kid" he influenced. He gave young people time, effort, and working with other adults in the community, gave us an opportunity to grow and develop in a positive way. He was a personal friend of major league pitcher, Bill James, OHS 1910 and OUHSD Hall of Fame 2012."

Along with Bill's extensive volunteer involvement with youth, he wrote for the Sacramento Bee for 15 years, served for 8 years as legislative aide to then Senator and 2012 OUHSD Hall of Famer, Ray E. Johnson, managed the Oroville Olives in 1948, and published 10 books, several of which are about Oroville area history. He was an active member of the Eagles and in 1972 was a member of the 2nd class ever inducted into the Northern California Sports Association Hall of Fame.

While Bill clearly ranked as a leading Butte County historian, he rankled at the title. He claimed he was merely a scribe and didn't have the academic background to claim to be a true historian. Specializing in local history, Bill served as editor of the Diggin's, the official publication of the Butte County Historical Society. In 1959, he printed his first edition of the Oroville Press, a weekly Oroville newspaper he had purchased.

Bill was born in Council Bluffs Iowa in 1914 and was reared in the Omaha, NB area. He was an outstanding right handed pitcher as a teen and later as a member of the Civilian Conservation Corps baseball team, a federally sponsored organization of the Great Depression. Bill passed away at a Chico Hospital in 1993 at age 79 after an extended illness.