

I have always been proud to call Valdese my hometown, and even though I have made my home elsewhere for well over 50 years, I still have a very special feeling each time I visit. The memories of places and events are still strong, as is my fondness for the people who helped shape those memories. For me, one of those places was the Valdese Community Center and one of those people was Wayne Owens.

Growing up in Valdese in the 50's and 60's the Valdese Community Center was a haven for me and many of my friends. I have always felt so fortunate to grow up in a community that embraced its youth and provided opportunities to learn and participate in sports and other activities, and to have a place like the Community Center to gather, play and learn. I probably spent more time there than I did at home, except for sleeping. I started playing basketball at the "Gym" in the third grade, although I'm not sure one could call it "playing". I had never played basketball before and didn't know the first thing about the game. I couldn't shoot dribble or pass, and when I entered a game, it was only because everyone had to play, at least a little. Wayne Owens was the director of youth activities and sports at the Community Center, and after that first season Wayne began to work with me one on one for seemingly hours at a time, day after day, teaching me to run, shoot, dribble and pass. Sometimes I wondered why he was doing all that for me, but then I realized Wayne did that for anyone and everyone of all ages who needed help. In all the years playing basketball, flag football and baseball at the Community Center, Wayne Owens was the constant that kept it all together and heading in the right direction. There was always some activity for us kids, boys and girls, to be involved in, whether it was a game, a practice, a dance or a field trip, and Wayne was there, teaching, coaching, mentoring.... and handing out a little discipline when it was needed (I know I received my share). My parents knew that if I was with Wayne, I was going to be OK.

There were many great athletes at Valdese High School during my era, both before and after, that came through the sports programs at the Valdese Community Center. In many ways, Wayne Owens was at least partially responsible for the many great teams on the field and on the court at VHS. The Valdese community was and is a better place because of Wayne's efforts at the Community Center, teaching and nurturing its youth. I, along with countless others, owe him a debt of gratitude.

Now, after all these years, and through the efforts of David Brinkley and others, the Town of Valdese has agreed to a fundraising effort aimed at honoring Wayne's memory by naming the basketball court at the Valdese Community Center **Wayne Owens Court**. I can think of no better tribute to a man who meant so much to so many.

Wayne Owens Court...sounds good to me.

Joe Brown

VHS class of 1965