

Dr. Roy K. Holcomb

Holcomb is best remembered as “The Father of Total Communication” and one of the highly respected leaders in deaf education in the 1970s.

A graduate of the Texas School for the Deaf, he came to the Sioux Falls to begin his first teaching career at the South Dakota School for the Deaf (SDSD) in 1947, after graduation from Gallaudet College (University). He was one of the legendary “Five Iron Men” of Gallaudet’s basketball fame — a member of the team that scored a stunning triple victory at the 1943 Mason-Dixon Conference basketball championship for the first championship in the history of the college.

In 1949, Holcomb became the first and only coach of the varsity football team at SDSD, and his six-man team posted a perfect season with four wins and no losses.

Despite his brief tenure (1947–55) at SDSD, Holcomb was one of the most admired and respected teachers and coaches. He was an effective teacher and reputed as one of the renowned deaf education administrators in America.

Holcomb believed strongly that deaf adults should strive for and maintain a high quality of life, particularly in the areas of education and leadership.

He promoted the concept of “Total Communication” across deaf America, which was adopted by many schools and programs for the deaf. He insisted that free communication was the key to a deaf child’s successful learning and becoming process.

Holcomb attended and graduated from several universities and received numerous honors, including the coveted Daniel T. Cloud Award and an honorary doctor of laws degree from Gallaudet University.

The deaf community has much thanks for Holcomb’s effortless and untiring services, which originated at proud SDSD. We will always remember Roy K. Holcomb for his achievements, his warm friendliness, humor and his love for his family and his community.

