DON CHRISTIANSEN

Although he hasn’t been a head baseball coach since 1988 when a stress-related heart attack forced him to resign his post at Chabot College, Don Christiansen is still actively coaching as a volunteer at Redwood Christian High School and at the Redwood Christian summer baseball camp.

 Ever since he began his coaching career at Mt. Eden High in Hayward in 1960, Christiansen has been known simply at “Coach Chris.”

 “Some of my friends don’t even know my first name,” he said, chuckling.

 Christiansen’s head coaching record includes five years at Mt. Eden, 11 at Laney College and 13 at Chabot where he had 502 career victories, won five conference titles and was named Northern California junior college coach of the year in 1980 when the Gladiators finished third in the state championships. He is enshrined in both the California Community College Baseball Coaches Hall of Fame (1992) and the Chabot College Athletics Hall of Fame (2002).

 One wall in Coach Chris’s downstairs family room is lined with photos of the 16 players he coached who went on to play in the major leagues. More than 170 of his players competed on the four-year college level and 65 signed professional baseball contracts.

 Mt. Eden was just opening when Christiansen landed the head baseball coaching job right out of San Jose State where he played catcher and was the team’s Most Valuable Player as a junior. He was also Laney’s first baseball coach, assuming the position when the Oakland technical college introduced liberal arts and athletics programs in 1965. Laney dominated the Coast Conference for three years “until they kicked us out and put us in the (much stronger) Golden Gate Conference.”

 In the GGC, Christiansen’s Eagles held their own against junior college powerhouses like San Mateo, Chabot and San Francisco. When Gene Wellman stepped down as the Chabot baseball coach to become the full-time athletic director in 1976 he hired Coach Chris to take over the baseball program.

 Christiansen also coached football at Laney, mostly the defensive backs. In fact, he was an assistant for the Laney team that shocked City College of San Francisco and its star running back, O.J. Simpson, in the 1966 Prune Bowl.

 Coach Chris lost “the love of my life,” his wife Nancy, to cancer in 2018. The couple, married for 52 years, raised three daughters – Debra, Leslie and Julie -- in Castro Valley. He has six grandchildren.