

High Marks at Nationals for Clinton Mock Trial Team

Clinton High School earned a fourth place finish during the National High School Mock Trial Championship held May 4-6 in Albuquerque N.M. The ranking represents the highest ever finish for an Oklahoma team.

“This year at the nationals, there were 46 teams competing, representing 42 states, Guam, the Mariana Islands and South Korea,” said Jennifer Bruner, chairperson of the OBA Young Lawyers Division Mock Trial Committee that coordinates the competition in Oklahoma. “The team’s strengths this year were their ability to lay a solid foundation for the admission of evidence, their poise and composure, and the chemistry between the team.”

The case presented during this year’s national competition involved elements of greed, revenge, extortion and murder pitting the U.S. government against a former Congressperson. The Mock Trial program is designed to teach students the principles of trial advocacy as they apply skills of debate, speech and critical thinking during a fictitious courtroom proceeding, with students playing the roles of prosecutor, defense attorney and witness.

“The goal of the team for this season was to play with passion, and they did,” Ms. Bruner said. “This team worked especially hard during the period leading up to and during the competition, and we were impressed not only with the team’s dedication, but their continued reception to coaching and ability to evolve, right up to the very last round of the competition.”

In addition to the team’s award, senior Donticia Banks was recognized as one of the top 10 best witnesses in the competition.

Clinton’s team is coached by teacher Kathy Kelley, attorney Julie Strong and Judge Jill Weedon. Team members in addition to Banks are Dayanna Barrios, Sarah Hill, Gerardo Marrufo, Chase Maxwell, CJ Smith, Emily Steffers and Quinn Weedon.

The team advanced to nationals through a series of rounds of competition that began in January. The team, one of two from Clinton High School, won the state finals in Norman in March.

Tulsa County District Judge Daman Cantrell has long been involved with the Mock Trial program in Oklahoma, and served as a judge at this year’s national competition.

“It was a thrilling and exciting weekend of competition,” Judge Cantrell said. “Clinton High School demonstrated they could compete with the best in the nation and delivered! Most of the teams at nationals were elite private schools, and I was particularly glad to see that an Oklahoma public school with excellent teaching and coaching showed it could defeat and compete with schools like Exeter from New Hampshire and Breck School from Minnesota that have tuition on a par with elite liberal arts colleges. This team was one for the ages.”

The Mock Trial Program is sponsored and funded by the OBA Young Lawyers Division and the Oklahoma Bar Foundation.



Several OBA members traveled to Albuquerque to serve as judges at the national Mock Trial competition or to support the Clinton High School team. Photographed with team members are OBA YLD Mock Trial Committee Chair Jennifer Bruner, Judge Daman Cantrell, Christine Cave, Nicole Longwell, Melissa Peros and the team’s attorney coach Judge Jill Weedon. Also participating were OBA Mock Trial Coordinator Judy Spencer, teacher coach Kathy Kelly and assistant teacher coach Ashley Kelley.

High School Mock Trial Committee Wraps Up Another Successful Year

By Jennifer Bruner

The 2012 OBA High School Mock Trial Competition presented Oklahoma students with a challenging murder trial, complete with opposing arson expert witnesses, disgruntled in-laws and testimony from friends and neighbors of the accused. The Mock Trial Case Development Committee of Christine Cave, Nicole Longwell, Dan Couch and Marsha Rogers masterfully wrote and created an interesting and emotionally charged set of facts that tested both student attorneys and student witnesses.

Special thanks go to Chief Homer Jones, Oklahoma City Fire Department assistant fire marshal and arson investigator, for his consultation and assistance in developing this case. The 2012 mock trial case is so well written and unique that the committee has already been contacted by other states who are interested in using the case for their future competitions. Our greatest thanks go to the Oklahoma Bar Foundation, which has enabled this program now in its 32nd year to continue to develop and grow year after year.

The OBA Mock Trial Committee would also like to recognize and extend its appreciation to the county bar associations that became actively involved



Mock Trial Committee members are (from left), Christine Cave, Dan Couch, Karolina Roberts, Marsha Rogers, Melissa Peros, Coordinator Judy Spencer, (above) Nicole Longwell, Joe Carson and Chair Jennifer Bruner. Other committee members are Erin Moore, Julie Austin Dewbery, Tai Du, Scott Inman, Jacob Rowe and Amanda Thrash.

in supporting schools within their county to develop a mock trial team, as well as providing coaching and financial assistance that enabled several schools and teams to participate in this year's competition.

Conducting numerous rounds of competition is no easy task, and it would not have been possible without the hundreds of lawyers and judges who volunteered their time – and many of them helped several times. Take a minute and glance at their names listed in this article. And I can't forget to thank the Young Lawyers Division, which continues its commitment to this program, and to my fellow committee mem-

bers who are responsible for another successful year.

This is an exciting time for the OBA Mock Trial Committee as we prepare our state champion from Clinton High School for the 2012 National Mock Trial Competition in May in Albuquerque, NM. Out of the 36 teams from 30 schools across the state that began competing in January, the top finishers were, in second place, Ada High School; third, Moore High School Team Red; fourth, Jenks High School Team A; fifth, Okarche High School; sixth, Jenks High School Team Mr. Roger's Neighborhood; seventh, McAlester High School, and eighth, Broken Arrow Team Black.

HELP RECRUIT TEAMS

Now that the 2012 Oklahoma Mock Trial Competition has come to an end, the Mock Trial Committee is seeking support from attorneys across the state to recruit additional schools to participate in the 2013 competition. If you know of a school or students interested in participating, if you would be interested in serving as an attorney coach — or if you'd like to join the Mock Trial Committee, please email mocktrial@okbar.org.

COACHING A TEAM REWARDING

"After serving as a scoring panelist or presiding judge at mock trial competitions for several years," Judge James Bland said, "I helped start a program at McAlester High School three years ago. My only regret now is that I waited so long. It is very rewarding to watch the students develop through their participation; however, I believe the best part is that, unlike some extracurricular activities, you can see the students themselves recognizing and appreciating their own development as it occurs. Their recognition of the many benefits they are receiving leads to great enthusiasm and commitment, which is in turn very fulfilling for the attorney and teacher coaches."

Judge Jill C. Weedon said of working with the winning Clinton team, "The legal team is student driven. They call team meetings at all times of day and night to work around jobs, sports, band and ballet. Every team member is dedicated to the project, and, at times, consumed by it. In the era of standardized testing, the Mock Trial Program is one of the few programs in education



Judging the final round to determine the state champion were (from left) Presiding Judge Edward Cunningham, Judge Shon Erwin, Judge Millie Otey, Justice Douglas Combs, Judge David B. Lewis and Judge Dana L. Rasure.

focusing on creativity and critical thinking. Mock trial students develop logic, public speaking, acting, and language skills, not to mention learning the rules of evidence. These students know how to present themselves, and they can think on their feet. The mock trial experience instills confidence and the ability to perform under pressure which will be lifelong assets."

NEW INITIATIVE

In addition, the Mock Trial Committee is starting a mock trial development initiative that will create instructional videos to provide guidance and assistance to students and schools who are just getting started or who have participated but now have new students involved. If you are interested in this program, now is the time to get involved and to help grow the program and enrich the lives of Oklahoma students. Work starts soon to prepare for next year's program that begins in the fall.

Ms. Bruner practices in Oklahoma City and chairs the High School Mock Trial Program Committee.

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Clinton High School's winning team was coached by teacher Kathy Kelley and attorney coaches Judge Jill Weedon and Julie Strong.

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 Drew Tate
 Brooke Tebow
 Matthew Thomas
 John Thomas
 Scott Thomas
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 John Turner
 Allison Wade
 Charles Watts
 Betty Outhier
 Williams
 Teresa Williams
 Tanya Wilson
 Meredith Wolfe
 Chuck Woodstock
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