



MOCK TRIAL NEWSLETTER

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25th ANNIVERSARY SEASON: MOCK TRIAL FROM A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

By Amy Marschall

Coach, Raleigh Charter High School



Back in the fall of 2007, I was ready to start a club that would give students the opportunity to create arguments. Many had clamored for a long time for a debate team. I started asking around, and a colleague told me about the mock trial program. She said that she'd heard it was a great way to give students a chance to sharpen their critical thinking skills, to put together long and reasoned arguments, and to develop their public speaking skills. She was right. I put the word out, and a small but dedicated group showed up for a meeting on a rainy Saturday afternoon. That day, too, we met Andrew LeLiever, our attorney advisor, a new young lawyer in town who'd been assigned to our school because he lived in the neighborhood. We had no idea how lucky we'd just gotten or how rewarding the path we were about to head down would be.

I like to tell the story that we won our first trial by negative one points. Two judges had us tied, but, forced to choose a winner, they circled our team. The other judge had us losing--by one point. It was enough to get us into the final round of the day, and it was that moment that ignited the passion. To understate the situation, we were not in contention that round. But we saw the possibilities—my students were so impressed by what the students who beat them (by way more than -1!) could do. I often find that we learn more from losing than we do from winning. Exposure to what students in other schools are

doing is a terrific contribution the mock trial program makes to our students' education. We hear a lot about sports, but the life of the mind is active, too.

Our very distant second-place finish was enough, back then, to get us an invitation to Charlotte, where the state championship was held. All that Andrew LeLiever had been trying to teach the students suddenly took on a new urgency, and it also made sense. He soon came to be an invaluable mentor for the students, and the relationship lasted through the years, despite the fact that he and his wife had five boys over the next four years! Andrew taught us the difference between a direct and a cross examination, how to write an opening and a closing, but above all, how to have fun with the fact pattern. He set up scrimmages for us and invited in judges and other attorneys to help us. His creativity contributed a great deal, too, as he helped us choose themes and figure out how to get the jury's attention. I can't overestimate what it means to students to get straightforward, genuine feedback on their performances. Andrew has always been tough on them, but they appreciated being respected as equals.



Things have changed a lot since our first years in the program. It's gotten much, much tougher to make it to the state competition, both because fewer teams are invited, but also because the number of teams involved has grown so much and the competition has stiffened accordingly. Although I regret that the opportunity to compete at the state level is more limited, I am very grateful to those who found a way to keep the program going, despite such challenges that it seemed it might fail. One can't help but celebrate the quality of the work students all across our state are producing.

And that work concerns serious topics. While students learn a lot about how our court system works and how rules of evidence ensure fairness, they learn so much more. The cases we've seen in recent years have gravitated towards matters that concern them directly, and I have appreciated this deeply. Parents can talk all they want about the dangers of texting and driving, but give a student the chance to play the role of a teen-aged driver whose friend dies in a wreck caused by driving and texting, and that means something more. Put yourself in the place of someone being threatened, bullied and harassed online, and you learn to use social media responsibly. And this year's look at police brutality is on point.

To my knowledge, I still don't have an attorney among the alums of our program, although our own Mary Felder works as a paralegal for Neufeld, Scheck, & Brustin (Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld founded the Innocence Project). But they all appreciate the confidence they gained from thinking through the case problems, finding the best way to tell a story, and then turning their thoughts upside down to create the other side. They appreciated having to think on their feet under pressure and discovering that they could, even when nervous. They learned to rejoice in each other's success and accept disappointments.

And I can't count the times I've been told that oral presentations in college went so much easier for them than for their classmates. The mock trial program contributes to readiness for all conceivable professions, and that's where my former students are. Anna Springfield (2009) works for the city of Minneapolis to develop bike trails and increase bicycle commuting. Zora Martignoni and Katie Weinel are in medical school, and Zora's sister Gwen is finishing up hotel management school. Jacob Tobia ran across the Brooklyn Bridge in high heels to raise money for the Ali Forney Center, the city's leading shelter for homeless LGBT youth (which was devastated by Hurricane Sandy). Jordan DeLoatch is working on Deborah Ross's campaign, and many are in graduate school studying a wide range of disciplines, including speech therapy, neuroscience, the Classics, and economics. Even more are currently on college

mock trial teams, and all of them have a deep appreciation for the court system. They may not be attorneys, but I know they will take their jury duty seriously when called!

Editor's note: Please consider inspiring our young people by serving as a team mentor. Teams in **Raleigh** and **Asheville** are in need of attorney advisors! Contact CCCE Program Coordinator Sue Johnson at SueHeathJohnson@gmail.com for more information. You'll be glad you did!



CALENDAR 2016 – 2017 MOCK TRIAL SEASON

Final Registration Deadline and \$175 Team Fee Due	Friday, Dec. 9, 2016
Team Member List, Code of Ethics, Release Forms Due	Friday, Jan. 6, 2017
Last Day to Withdraw Without Penalty	Friday, Jan. 6, 2017
Regional Competition	Saturday, Feb. 4, 2017
Widenhouse Award Nomination Materials Due	Weds., Feb. 22, 2017
State Finals Competition	Fri. – Sat., March 10-11, 2017
National Championship, Hartford, CT	May 11-13, 2017

THANK YOU TO OUR 2016 – 2017 COMPETITION SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS!

State Finals:	Rudolf Widenhouse
Asheville:	Melrose Law, PLLC
Charlotte area:	The Sumwalt Law Firm
Fayetteville:	Britton Law, P.A.
Greenville:	Hardee & Hardee, LLP
High Point:	Manger Law Firm
Pittsboro:	Glenn Mills Fisher & Mahoney, P.A.
Supporter:	Durham County Bar Association
Raleigh:	Twiggs Strickland & Rabenau, and Maurer Law, Co-Sponsors
Salisbury:	Rowan County Bar Association
Wilmington:	Shipman & Wright

CAMPBELL UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW - partnering with CCCE to host our State Finals!

THANK YOU TO OUR 2016 – 2017 OUTREACH PROGRAM SPONSOR!

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IT TAKES A VILLAGE . . .

Special thanks to our 2016-17 Regional Coordinators and CCCE Board Members: Asheville Regional Coordinators Mark Melrose and Marion Parsons-Groat, Charlotte Area Regional Coordinator Holden Clark, Fayetteville Regional Coordinator Rebecca Britton, Greenville Regional Coordinators Jeffrey Cannon and Phil Entzminger, High Point Regional Coordinator Rich Manger, Pittsboro Regional Coordinators Liz Barber and Robert Jessup, Raleigh Regional Coordinators Christine Scheef and Lindsey Granados, Salisbury Regional Coordinator Darrin Jordan, Wilmington Regional Coordinator John H. Anderson, Jr.; and CCCE Board Members Gordon Widenhouse, Rebecca Britton, Rich Manger, Bradley Bannon, Adrienne Blocker, Christine Scheef, Brooke Schmidly, Mark Sumwalt; Bill Powers (ex officio) and David Henson (ex officio).

Special thanks also to our 2016-17 Site Coordinators:

***Asheville:* Brett Pinkston and Victoria Townley, **Charlotte area:** Beverly K. Moore, **Fayetteville:** Tanja Shurling and Karen Kueny, **Greenville:** Jessi Cannon, **High Point:** Rose Pratt and Jane Goeke, **Pittsboro:** Patti Clapper and Lakisha Chichester, **Raleigh:** Michelle Keely and Sandra Strickland, **Salisbury:** Emily Applewhite, and **Wilmington:** Brandy Jo Lea and Christi Wert.**

*****If you are interested in supporting or learning more about the NCAJ High School Mock Trial program, please contact Sue Johnson, State Coordinator, at sueheathjohnson@gmail.com, or Rebecca Britton or Gordon Widenhouse, Mock Trial Committee Co-Chairs, at rebecca@brittonlawfirm.com or mgwidenhouse@yahoo.com.***