



MOCK TRIAL NEWSLETTER

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25th ANNIVERSARY SEASON: MOCK TRIAL PARTICIPATION CHANGES LIVES

*By Sue H. Johnson
CCCE State Coordinator*

"That was the best week of my life! Now I know what I want to do....become an attorney!"

It was July of 2009. Our homeschooled teenage son had just completed a week-long moot court camp in Virginia – his first introduction to the legal profession. He'd balked when I suggested it, insisting he had no interest in law. But I enrolled him anyway. After all, he relished ~~arguing~~ discussing current events at the dinner table. The camp seemed tailor-made for his abilities and inclinations. Happily, his enthusiasm proved my instincts had been correct.



I had no background in the law myself; my dad was a nationally-renowned groundwater hydrologist, and I'd earned degrees in mathematics and public health at UNC. Our youngest son had seemed headed down a similar science-focused path. But the intellectual challenge and excitement of the law had ignited his interest. When we learned about the NCAJ High School Mock Trial Program, we knew it was a perfect way to pursue his new passion.



We formed a team with friends in his homeschool speech/debate club, and I agreed to serve as head coach. With untold hours of intense study, hard work, and dedication, as well as the generous guidance of then-attorney Lucy Inman, Philip Cowan, Judge Paul Ridgeway, and LaDonna Williams, we earned 3rd place in NC as a first year team. We went on to win the state championship in 2011 and earned 9th place at nationals – an exciting experience indeed!

While the trophies and accolades were gratifying, far more important were the skills and self-confidence the students gained. They learned to analyze complex issues from multiple perspectives; communicate clearly and persuasively; and work together effectively while remaining calm and cool in a pressure-filled situation. The transformation was remarkable, even life-changing, for me as well as for my students.



So when the opportunity arose in December of 2011 to work with the CCCE, I leaped at the chance. I knew firsthand what a difference the mock trial program makes, not only for the students, but also for the teacher-coaches, attorney advisors, and even the community at large. You see, when we began this adventure, our impression of the legal profession was based primarily on the way attorneys are portrayed in the media – which is, of course, often distorted and not very flattering.

Through the mock trial program, we got to know attorneys and judges first-hand. We saw how they generously shared their time and expertise to help students learn about our trial-by-jury system and our rights and responsibilities as citizens. We heard stories of how they'd assisted individuals who suffered injuries. We learned how their efforts helped promote a just society for us all. Through mock trial, the students and families on our team – and on teams across the state – came to understand and appreciate our constitution and the judges and attorneys who uphold it.

Most mock trial participants will go on to pursue other careers (as alumna Meagan Briley details in the next article). Of the eight students on my team, only two are attending law school. The others are choosing careers as varied as dentistry, family medicine, sales/marketing, and entrepreneurship. Yet they have all been enriched by their mock trial experience. Truly, the countless legal professionals who have invested their energies in this program over the past 25 years have made a lasting impact! It is a privilege to be a part of it all.

And our son? Well, he's about to finish his 2L year as a Rubenstein Scholar at the University of Chicago School of Law. We're excited to see what his future holds and are profoundly grateful for the influence of mock trial on his life and the lives of so many others.

MOCK TRIAL EXPERIENCE PROVES INVALUABLE FOR MEDICAL STUDENT

*By Meagan Briley
CCCE Mock Trial Alumnus*



Of all of my activities in high school, mock trial easily stands out as the most important, not only because I enjoyed it so much, but because the skills I gained through my participation have long outlasted my time on the team and continue to benefit me to this day. Even though the practice of law is not my professional calling, my experience in the NCAJ High School Mock Trial Competition helped me tremendously as I transitioned into college and continues to help me as I begin interacting with patients in medical school.

I first joined the mock trial team during my junior year of high school and immediately wished that I had joined two years sooner. For a fairly competitive person with little athletic ability, mock trial's offer of competition on the basis of preparation and mental agility was perfect. Over

that year and the next, I was fortunate to play the role of attorney on both sides of the two cases. I did not realize it then, but playing those opposing roles was an excellent opportunity for personal growth that would prove beneficial as I moved on from J.H. Rose High School.

Arguing and competing for both sides of a case forced me to see the evidence from two widely differing viewpoints. Instead of allowing a sole focus on half of the case to convince me that our side's argument was clearly the best, and probably even beyond the weight of the evidence, having to constantly switch sides and perspectives helped me learn to recognize the weaknesses in my cases and to keep my reasoning more tightly anchored in the evidence available. This lesson proved particularly valuable as I moved from high school to college. When I began taking classes and participating in workshops that focused on history, science, politics, and social justice issues, I realized that people's opinions, arguments, and ideas varied more widely than I had ever noticed before. The earlier practice in weighing opposing ideas, trying to consider arguments, looking at evidence from different perspectives, and making sure that my ideas were supported by fact helped me transition to the more diverse college environment and get the most out of the learning opportunities presented there.

Even five years out from my last high school mock trial competition, I can still see the lasting effects of the program. As a first year medical student, I spend a good deal of time learning the art of taking a patient's history. The more I have learned about the process, the more I realize that it is incredibly similar to the direct examinations of witnesses that I used to prepare for our cases. When taking a patient history, it is vitally important that one ask open-ended questions and allow the patient to tell his or her own story in his or her own words, as the information provided and the way it is presented gives valuable insight into the symptoms the



patient finds most concerning or debilitating. Avoiding leading questions is extremely important, as patients very much want to please their doctors and can be led to give the "correct" answer if that answer is already contained in the question, thus preventing the physician from recognizing health behaviors that could be addressed and improved. Likewise, avoiding compound questions is crucial, as patients and people in general only answer the last part of a two-part question. When trying to narrow down a long list of differential diagnoses, missing an answer could lead to gaps in the evidence that change the course of a person's treatment and patient outcomes. I am so thankful that I had the opportunity to begin practicing these skills in high school, when the threat of an opponent's objections kept me from falling into bad habits, as these seemingly small techniques could very well make a significant difference in the treatment of my future patients.

Despite the enormous value and lasting influence of the lessons learned through my participation in mock trial, the impact of relationships built with the volunteer attorney coaches and teachers far surpasses anything else I took away from the program. Looking back on it now, I realize by just how much I underestimated their generosity and their commitment to advancing the education of their students and

team members. At least three days a week, after an entire day at work, they spent over two hours at mock trial practice, guiding us, teaching us, and challenging us as needed to ensure that the team received the maximum benefit from each member's talents and abilities.

It was through the mock trial team that I was fortunate to meet the single greatest teacher I have ever had and one of the best people I will probably ever know, Ms. Liza Knight. As much as I learned from her in the classroom and in the mock trial courtroom, her guidance, support, compassion, and humility outside of those two arenas have impacted me in ways she may never even know. When I was rejected from a scholarship program on the day before both my eighteenth birthday and the state mock trial competition, and it seemed as if my college plans were crashing down around my ears, it was Mrs. Knight that managed to keep them from hitting the ground. She was able to lift me back up, to push the sky back over my head, when it seemed as if even my parents and friends could not. For introducing me to her and the other coaches who have had a lasting impact on my life and my professional development, I am extremely grateful to the NCAJ High School Mock Trial Competition.

Editor's note: Want to learn how you can be involved in impacting students in such significant ways? Contact CCCE State Coordinator Sue Johnson at SueHeathJohnson@gmail.com. You'll be glad you did!

CALENDAR 2016 – 2017 MOCK TRIAL SEASON

National Championship, Hartford, CT
Summer Camp, Chapel Hill, NC

May 11-13, 2017
July 26 – 29, 2017

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

State Finals:	Rudolf Widenhouse
Asheville:	Melrose Law, PLLC
<i>Supporters:</i>	28 th Judicial District Bar Association & Asheville Area Paralegal Assn.
Fayetteville:	Britton Law, P.A.
<i>Supporter:</i>	Cumberland County Bar Association
Gastonia:	The Sumwalt Law Firm
Greenville:	Hardee & Hardee, LLP
High Point:	Manger Law Firm
Pittsboro:	Glenn Mills Fisher & Mahoney, P.A.
<i>Supporter:</i>	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!

NORTH CAROLINA STATE BAR – also hosting rounds at State Finals!

THANK YOU TO OUR 2016 – 2017 OUTREACH PROGRAM SPONSOR!

Lawyers Mutual Liability Insurance Company of North Carolina

IT TAKES A VILLAGE . . .

Special thanks to our 2016-17 Regional Coordinators and CCCE Board Members: Asheville Regional Coordinator Mark Melrose, Fayetteville Regional Coordinator Rebecca Britton, Gastonia Regional Coordinators Holden Clark and Daniel O'Shea, 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, **Fayetteville:** Tanja Shurling and Karen Kueny, **Gastonia:** Beverly K. Moore, **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.

****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.**