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Contra Costa County High School Mock Trial is looking for volunteer legal professionals

Submitted by Jonathan Lance



Bay Area soon-to-be, practicing, and retired law professionals are needed to provide assistance to their future brothers and sisters at the upcoming 38th Annual Contra Costa County High School Mock Trial Program, held on seven early weekday evenings during January and February at the Martinez Court Rooms. Last year, close to 100 Bay Area practicing and retired attorneys and sworn judges, as well as third-year law students volunteered their time with the Mock Trials.

Coordinated by the Contra Costa County Office of Education, Mock Trial is an academic event provided for high school students. The hands-on educational program was created to help students acquire a working knowledge of our judicial system, develop analytical abilities and communication skills, and gain an understanding of their obligations and responsibilities as participating members of our society. This year's case,

People v. Davidson, is a criminal case involving first-degree murder and a pretrial argument on the Fourth Amendment.

Teams of high school students work with teachers and volunteer coaches to prepare their version of the criminal case, from both the prosecution and defense perspectives. Students assume the roles of trial attorneys, pretrial motion attorneys, witnesses, clerks, bailiffs, artists, and court journalists. Mock Trial judges and attorneys score their performance and provide immediate feedback. Winning teams advance through seven rounds of competition. The county's champion advances to the state finals. This year, there will be 15 Mock Trial teams competing, representing high schools throughout Contra Costa County.

Volunteers will score two competing schools that argue the case in their assigned court. Each night will begin with a 15-minute rules and regulations training, then the volunteers will go into their scheduled courtrooms to serve as Mock Trial judge and scorers. The Mock Trials' scorers are made up of Bay Area deputy district attorneys and deputy public defenders, as well as public-sector, private-practice, and corporate lawyers. In addition, seasoned law students are also welcome to participate. A practicing or retired judge or commissioner will preside over each trial, and also serves as one of the trial's scorers.

The two highest-scoring teams will advance to the finals on Tuesday, Feb. 20. The winning team will then represent Contra Costa County at the California State Mock Trial competition, held in Santa Ana, Calif., March 16-18. The California state finalist team will then compete in the National Mock Trial Competition, held May 10-12, in Reno, Nevada.

In 1977, the Constitutional Rights Foundation introduced the concept of mock trials to the Los Angeles schools. In 1980, the program expanded to the state level. The California Mock Trial Program currently involves more than 36 counties and over 8,000 student participants from more than 400 teams. Approximately 1,500 attorney volunteers serve as team coaches and scorers, and 500 Municipal, Superior, and Appellate Court judges preside over the trials.

Mock Trial will be headquartered at the A.F. Bray Courthouse, 1020 Ward Street, in Martinez.

Interested volunteers can learn more by visiting the CCCOE's Mock Trial Web page, or contacting Jonathan Lance at (925) 942-3429.

Schedule for 2018 Contra Costa County High School Mock Trials:

Preliminaries: Jan. 30; Feb. 1, 6, 8, - 5 to 8 p.m. (Eight competitions each night)

Quarterfinals: Feb. 13, 5 to 8 p.m. (Four competitions)

Semifinals: Feb. 15, 5 to 8 p.m. (Two competitions)

Final and Consolation: Feb. 20, 5 to 8 p.m. (Two competitions)

Teams from the following 16 Contra Costa County high schools will be competing:

Acalanes (Lafayette), Alhambra (Martinez), California (San Ramon), Campolindo (Moraga), Clayton Valley Charter (Concord), De Anza High (Richmond), Deer Valley Law Academy (Antioch), El Cerrito (El Cerrito), Hercules Middle/High (Hercules), Heritage (Brentwood), Kennedy (Richmond), Miramonte (Orinda), Monte Vista (Danville), Pinole Valley (Pinole), Richmond (Richmond).

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