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Contra Costa County High School Mock Trial seeks volunteers with legal expertise

Submitted by Jonathan Lance



Photos Jonathan Lance, CCCOE

People v. Klein - a young adult is charged with two felony counts: making a false report of an emergency (in this case, commonly referred to as "swatting") and making a criminal threat.

"This program is a great tool to ensure that our students understand the workings of the trial courts and thus the importance of an independent judiciary," says Contra Costa County Presiding Judge Barry Baskin, a longtime Mock Trial volunteer, who encourages all of his local fellow law professionals to join him in assisting with this year's Mock Trial Competition.

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, pre-trial 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 17 Mock Trial teams competing, representing high schools throughout all of Contra Costa County, including Acalanes, Campolindo and Miramonte high schools.

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.

"We applaud the hard work and time our students and their coaches put in to prepare for our Mock Trial program," said Contra Costa County Superintendent of Schools Lynn Mackey. "In addition, we are grateful for the continued generous volunteer support we receive from our county's Judicial, District Attorney, and Public Defender offices, as well as so many of our current and retired public- and private-practice attorneys. This successful program would never come together without so much support from the community."

Bay Area soon-to-be, practicing, and retired law professionals are needed to provide assistance to their future brethren at the upcoming 38th Annual Contra Costa County High School Mock Trial Program, held on seven early weekday evenings during late January and early February, in 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 is



Contra Costa County Superior Court Judges Joni Hiramoto and Steven Austin.

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