

MOCK TRIAL NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2015

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REFLECTIONS ON HOSTING NATIONALS

By M. Gordon Widenhouse, Jr.

CCCE President and 2015 NHSMTTC Host Director



Someone asked me recently, “What was the best thing about the experience of North Carolina hosting the NHSMTTC in Raleigh this year?” The best thing? You’re kidding. I can only name one thing?

Unable to narrow it down (and realizing the futility of any effort to say “thank you” by trying to list each person who helped with this project--not to mention anyone I left off the list would never help me with mock trials again), I decided to pay homage to David Letterman with my own, mostly serious, Top Ten List. Here goes.

Top Ten Things About Hosting Nationals

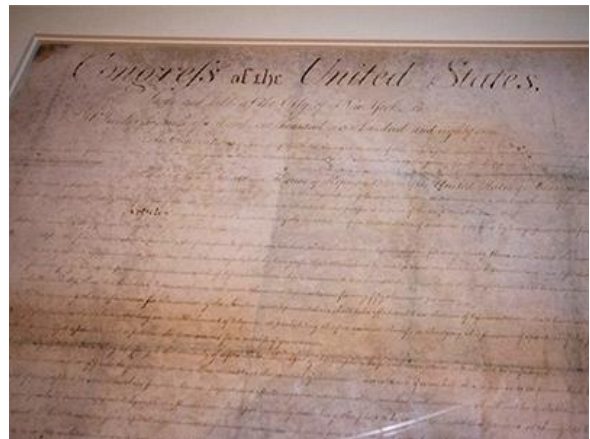
10. Watching Justice Paul Newby give three talks on litigating the NC’s effort to get our Bill of Rights back. We could not get all of the attendees at the Thursday evening Pin Exchange into one room. We improvised and used three rooms, so he had to go from room-to-room and give the talk three times. His jokes worked every time. [As a side note, the Pin Exchange itself was a big hit with the students as it included intermittent entertainment by circus performers both inside and outside the hotel.]

9. Hearing Chief Justice Mark Martin extol the civic-education value of the NC mock trial program at the Friday evening Judge’s Reception. The many judges and lawyers (many from outside North Carolina) who attended this reception at the opulent North Carolina State Bar were impressed with his knowledge of and commitment to NC’s mock trial program. His words reinforced the importance of the work by and financial support of so many people that keep the mock trial experience going. [As a side note, the State Bar was very accommodating in NC’s hosting. The catering by *PoshNosh* was excellent.]

8. “Stop Collard Greens Oppression” T-Shirt. Perhaps this item is a tad selfish. But it is my list. Near the end of the Hospitality Suite on Saturday night, the National Board typically gives the host directors a humorous parting gift. Mine was a T-shirt saying, “Stop Collard Greens Oppression.” Apparently, I spent so much time singing the praises of this epicurean delicacy to the Board over the past three years, they expected collards at every meal. In fact, none were ever served, which led them to conclude collards had been oppressed. Board members (and others) had been directed to both the Pit and the Mecca during their time in Raleigh. So they have no one but themselves to blame for not savoring collards while here. [As a side note, it would be difficult to find a group of people who more selflessly give to high school mock trials than the members of the National Board. So their thoughtful, teasing was especially touching.]

7. Bringing Rich Manger to the stage to present the top attorney awards. Rich is the only person who has been continuously involved with high school mock trials in North Carolina as long as I have. We go back to the beginning--even before the program became associated with the Academy (now NCAJ). Rich exemplifies the volunteer spirit that is essential to this type of effort. He has long been the coordinator of the High Point Regional, has anchored the scoring effort at State Finals for many years, and has become a valued friend and colleague. And he presided over and led all four judge-orientation sessions at Nationals. [As a side note, he apparently does not like collards. Nobody is perfect.]

6. Seeing the Bill of Rights. Thanks to the support of our mock trial program from so many people, including Chief Justice Martin, Justice Newby, and Lt. Gov. Dan Forrest, the State Archives opened “after hours” on Friday evening during the Scavenger Hunt and allowed students, coaches, parents, judges, and volunteers to see this valued document. The staff brought it into the auditorium of the Archives building. This unexpected opportunity, which came to pass just before people began arriving in Raleigh for the competition, was one of several developments that capped the experience of the competition for everyone. [As a side note, if you did not see this document, you owe it to yourself to do so when you are next in Raleigh. We sometimes overlook treasures in our own backyard.]



5. Having Brooke Schmidly on the scoring jury for the Championship Round. My first experience with high school mock trials came in 1993, when I presided over the final round of the competition. Brooke was a junior on the team from Salem Academy. Of course, Brooke’s father, the late Steve Schmidly, was in the audience. Steve was a long time mock trial coach for Asheboro High School, a mentor to many in the mock trial arena, and an ardent supporter of high school mock trials. To recall Brooke as a high school mock trial participant and then see her as a scoring juror in the Championship Round at Nationals this year (not to mention her being a mock trial coach along the way), is a reminder of the ripple effect when from tossing a pebble into a pond—and why it is so important to volunteer. [As a side note, Andy McVey, another of Steve’s protégées, also served as a scoring juror in the Championship Round.]

4. Watching law school deans, former chief justices, and judges and lawyers from across North Carolina invade Raleigh. One of the daunting aspects of hosting this event concerned having courtrooms and people to hold 23 trials during each of four preliminary rounds. That meant having 92 judges/lawyers per round, to serve as a presiding judge and three scoring jurors in each trial. And that number does not include the volunteers necessary to provide a courtroom liaison for each trial and staff assistance in the courthouses and other venues. It was humbling and gratifying to watch those 92 judges/lawyers stride into the orientation room on Friday morning, Friday afternoon, Saturday morning, and Saturday afternoon. The groups included a majority of the justices and judges on our two appellate courts; judges

and lawyers from across the state; law school deans and professors; even retired Chief Justices of our state supreme court. So many people answered the call to help. [As a side note, we are always looking for people to participate with our state program. Don't be bashful.]

3. Seeing a North Carolina team capture fifth place. I confess to having a special feeling of “home state pride” when Rebecca Britton, my longtime cohort in “all things mock trials,” announced the Central Carolina Homeschoolers had finished as the fifth place team in the country. I have seen many of those students compete for several years at our state and regional events, know many of their parents, and have great respect for their attorney advisor, Darren Allen. They all work extremely hard, and Darren is vigilant in his commitment to his team. Presenting them with the Fifth Place trophy and standing alongside them for their picture (flanked on the left by Chief Justice Martin) was a high water mark for me. [As a side note, Darren is yet another protégée of Steve Schmidly.]



2. Welcoming Justice Scalia to Raleigh. It is one of the truly great understatements to say our hosting of this year's NHSMTTC gained altitude when Justice Scalia agreed to come to Raleigh and give the keynote address. We had no connections and did not know what to expect when he arrived. He was engaging with everyone and very showed great patience as many people, including a handful of state appellate judges, sidled up to him for a quick “selfie.” He pulled no punches in his speech at the Awards Ceremony. In smaller group settings, he was quite personable. His presence made the event very close to a once-in-a-lifetime experience. [As a side note,

sometime when you have a few minutes, ask me what it is like to tell a sitting Supreme Court Justice, who is flanked by four (presumably armed) U.S. Marshals, the awards ceremony is running an hour behind and you do not intend to let him leave the auditorium until he speaks. Luckily, I am still here.]

1. Remembering: It's about the kids! As the ten top witnesses, then the ten top attorneys, and finally the ten top teams mounted the stage to accept their trophies (augmented by the sights and sounds provided by Creative Visions Inc. of Raleigh), their excitement was palpable; indeed, it was infectious. Congratulating each of these deserving, hardworking, and accomplished students was exhilarating. Members of the National Board are constantly reiterating about the purpose of the NHSMTTC—it is all about the kids. It is. But as I reflected on the work of so many people in North Carolina over the past three years leading to the splendid event in May, it takes hundreds of people volunteering countless hours to make it happen. And every one of them worked so hard to make this a special event for the kids. [As a side note, next year's NHSMTTC is in Boise, Idaho. I suspect they would welcome any volunteers.]



Epilogue. I now realize even a Top Ten List hardly answers “What was the best thing about North Carolina hosting the NHSMTTC in Raleigh this year?” The memories are many and will be long lasting. To all who helped, in whatever way, THANK YOU. *For more photos, visit <https://djpgpics.smugmug.com/NHSMTTC>.*

Gordon Widenhouse has been involved with the North Carolina High School Mock Trial Program for twenty-four years. He feels rejuvenated by the past year's experience.

CALENDAR 2015 – 2016 MOCK TRIAL SEASON

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| Competition Case Released! | Tuesday, Sept. 1, 2015 |
| Early Registration Deadline | Friday, Sept. 25, 2015 |
| Final Registration Deadline and \$175 Team Fee Due | Friday, Dec. 11, 2015 |
| Team Member List, Code of Ethics, Release Forms Due | Friday, Jan. 8, 2016 |
| **Last Day to Withdraw Without Penalty** | Friday, Jan. 8, 2016 |
| Regional Competition | Saturday, Feb. 6, 2016 |
| Widenhouse Award Nomination Materials Due | Weds., Feb. 24, 2016 |
| State Finals Competition | Fri. – Sat., March 11-12, 2016 |
| National Championship, Boise, ID | May 12-14, 2016 |

IT TAKES A VILLAGE . . .

Special thanks to our 2015-16 Regional Coordinators and CCCE Board Members: Asheville Regional Coordinators Mark Melrose and Marion Parsons-Groat, Charlotte Regional Coordinator Jennifer Errington, Durham Regional Coordinators Russell Johnson and Robert Jessup, Fayetteville Regional Coordinator Rebecca Britton, Greenville Regional Coordinator Philip Entzminger, High Point Regional Coordinator Rich Manger, Raleigh Regional Coordinators Christine Scheef and Lindsey Granados, Wilmington Regional Coordinator John H. Anderson, Jr.; and ***CCCE Board Members*** Gordon Widenhouse, Rebecca Britton, Rich Manger, Adrienne Blocker, Chris Nichols, Katy Parker, Christine Scheef, and Brooke Schmidly.

Special thanks also to our 2015-16 Site Coordinators:

Asheville: Victoria Townley, ***Charlotte:*** Beverly K. Moore, ***Durham:*** Patti Clapper and Lakisha Chichester, ***Fayetteville:*** Elizabeth Owens, ***Greenville:*** Kristin Miller and Jill Gustman; ***High Point:*** Karen Parrish, ***Raleigh:*** Michelle Keely and Fran LaFrankie, ***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, Program Coordinator, at sueheathjohnson@gmail.com, or Rebecca Britton or Gordon Widenhouse, Mock Trial Committee Co-Chairs, at rebecca@brittonlawfirm.com or mgwidenhouse@yahoo.com.***