

## MOCK TRIAL NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2015

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**"Investing in our future, creating tomorrow's leaders"**

### **WHY DO I VOLUNTEER? NO, REALLY, WHY DO I DO THIS?**

*By Chris Nichols, NCAJ President and Mock Trial Team Attorney Advisor*



I probably ask myself those questions once a week. Today was a typical Tuesday for me. I had three phone conferences, a brief due, and I taught a CLE over the phone from 12:30 to 1:30. I went back to that brief until 2:00 and then then I left to go teach my mock trial team. I've been coaching a team off and on for twenty-two years. Longer than I've been a lawyer. I'll admit that when I had to close my computer at 2:00, the stress was heavy on me and I really didn't feel like taking a two and a half hour break in my day for mock trial. Clients needed me, I had NCAJ things to do, and the entire Board of Governors was coming the next day. I was kicking myself for volunteering.

Until I got to school. My students were laughing and talking about mock trial and world politics. They debated Donald Trump's rhetorical skills and political acumen. They gave each other a hard time for not finishing mock trial homework. They talked about their classes and life. And I could feel the pressures of the day melting away as I got in the mock trial zone.



Because I needed to write this article, I was thinking throughout our practice about how mock trial made me feel. What I discovered is that when I'm volunteering, I'm usually at my happiest point in the day. The kids appreciate what we do more than some clients appreciate my efforts. And the demands of practicing law – those demands that wake you up at night, or don't let you go to bed – fade into the background more than in any other part of my day.

Of course, it's not all about me and what I get out of mock trial, but if I got nothing, I doubt I would do it. No, mock trial is about the bargained-for exchange: I give the students my time and knowledge, and they give me laughs and a break from the grinding demands of law. It's a fair exchange. In fact, I might be getting more out of the deal than they do.

There are other benefits to volunteering. I meet like-minded lawyers from across the state. I get to wrap my civil-practitioner head around a criminal issue every other year and get a new appreciation for how difficult that practice can be. My students ask me questions that remind me of why I became a lawyer: How is that fair? Can the State really do that? How do poor people get lawyers in the real world? Why do we have the right to confront our accusers? What do you say to a client in this situation?

Mock trial gets to the root of our justice system. Sure, we help high school students see how the law works, and why it works. But it also reminds us that this "system" is ultimately about people and how we can live together in a society of laws. I don't know about you, but that sort of 30,000-foot thinking usually eludes me during a typical day at the office. Mock trial reminds me that what I do on a daily basis is the exercise of the basis of our democracy – the trial by jury.

You get these benefits even when you judge or site volunteer. Seeing fresh faces putting their all into an argument is inspiring! You can't help but be impressed with the work the students do and the sincerity of their efforts. And it's not just the good teams that inspire. About 15 years ago I watched a round where an inexperienced school took on an experienced school. During the opening, the inexperienced lawyer froze, then started to cry. Everyone in the courtroom held their breath wondering what would happen. Then the lawyer for the other team got up and went to the terrified weeping lawyer – and gave her a hug. They spoke, and the experienced team agreed that a "do over" was in order. And that's what we did. With most of us quietly wiping away a tear of our own.



So how was my Tuesday? Fabulous. It started out pretty rough, but took an amazing turn around 2:00. I hope yours did, too.

**Our regional competitions will take place on February 6, 2016 at eight locations statewide.** We have a record number of teams registered this year, and we need YOUR help! Won't you join us by serving as a presiding judge or scoring juror at a site near you?

**To register**, download a registration form on our website at <http://www.ncmocktrial.org/get-involved/judge> or contact CCCE Regional Coordinator Sue Johnson at [SueHeathJohnson@gmail.com](mailto:SueHeathJohnson@gmail.com).

## **THANK YOU TO OUR 2015 – 2016 OUTREACH PROGRAM SPONSOR!**

**Lawyers Mutual Liability Insurance Company of North Carolina**

**We still need more sponsorship support** to fully realize the goals of our outreach program. If you can join us in this important outreach, please contact Sue at [SueHeathJohnson@gmail.com](mailto:SueHeathJohnson@gmail.com) or CCCE Vice-President Rebecca Britton at [rebecca@brittonlawfirm.com](mailto:rebecca@brittonlawfirm.com)

## **THANK YOU TO OUR 2015 – 2016 COMPETITION SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS!**

**State Finals: Rudolf Widenhouse & Fialko**

Asheville: Melrose Law Firm, P.A.

Supporter: 28<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Bar Association

Charlotte: The Sumwalt Law Firm

Durham: **\*\*Sponsor Needed!\*\***

Supporter: Durham County Bar Association

Fayetteville: Britton Law, P.A.

Supporter: Cumberland County Bar Association

Greenville: Hardee & Hardee, LLP

High Point: Manger Law Firm

Raleigh: Leone Noble & Seate and Twiggs Strickland & Rabenau, Co-Sponsors

Wilmington: Shipman & Wright

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

## **CALENDAR 2015 – 2016 MOCK TRIAL SEASON**

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 Phillip Entzinger, 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 Byrum; **High Point:** TBD, **Raleigh:** Michelle Keely and Sandra Strickland, **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](mailto:sueheathjohnson@gmail.com), or Rebecca Britton or Gordon Widenhouse, Mock Trial Committee Co-Chairs, at [rebecca@brittonlawfirm.com](mailto:rebecca@brittonlawfirm.com) or [mgwidenhouse@yahoo.com](mailto:mgwidenhouse@yahoo.com).**