



## MOCK TRIAL NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2013

*Brought to you by the  
Carolina Center for Civic Education and the NCAJ Mock Trial Committee  
"Investing in our future, creating tomorrow's leaders"*

### **INSIGHTS OF AN ATTORNEY ADVISOR: AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVE SCHMIDLY**

*By Sue H. Johnson*

*CCCE Mock Trial Program Coordinator*

For 14 seasons between 1994-95 and 2011-12, attorney Steve Schmidly mentored mock trial students at Asheboro High School. During that time, Asheboro High won an unprecedented 7 state championships (1996, 1999-2004), even earning 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation in 2000. In late November, I had the distinct pleasure of speaking with Steve about his experiences as an attorney advisor. Here are some of the highlights of our conversation:



*Steve coaches his team in 1995*

#### **How did you get involved in the mock trial program?**

The mock trial program began in 1993, and my daughter, Brooke, was on the Salem Academy team in 1993 and 1994. Watching her compete, I could see what a valuable experience it was for the students. When Mary Kelly, a wonderful teacher at Asheboro High School, approached me in 1995 and asked me to advise a team, I jumped at the opportunity. My father taught me the importance of giving back to the community, and what better way to do so than by helping with mock trial?

#### **How many students participated at Asheboro High School?**

We had one team the first year. After our second season, we had two teams every year, one for upperclassmen and one for underclassmen. Altogether I probably mentored nearly 250 students during my time at Asheboro. They were great kids, many of them active in sports, student government, drama, or cheerleading, too. Many of them went on to do mock trial in college, and several even got large college scholarships because of high school mock trial.

#### **Have you kept in touch with many of them?**

Oh, yes; I think I've heard from nearly everyone in the past year. We communicate via Facebook or they visit me when they are home. And all of them, without exception, say that mock trial was the most important activity they did in high school. That's true whether they went into law as a profession or an entirely different field.

#### **How many of your former students practice law?**

Twelve of them are practicing attorneys, with several of the current undergraduates expressing an interest in law school. I'd say only 5% or so enter the legal profession. Of course mock trial was very helpful for them, making them more at ease in the courtroom as attorneys. I also know of two doctors, a nuclear physicist, 2 vocalists on Broadway, a news anchor at WNCN (Sean Maroney), several PhDs, and a plumber – so mock trial benefits a wide range of kids.

### **A nuclear physicist!? How did mock trial benefit him?**

He's doing post-doctoral work at Cornell right now. Last time I spoke with him, he told me that the difference between him and the other "eggheads" at Cornell is that he knows how to talk persuasively with others about his research. He attributes his communication skills to mock trial. That's true for many of my former students. Mock trial teaches students to take facts, develop a persuasive argument for either side, and deliver it in a way that convinces people you are right.

### **What are some of the other lessons students learn through mock trial?**

The importance of preparation. Mock trial taught my students that they have to work hard to be successful, that it takes lots of time and effort. They should always do their best. That's an important life skill for any profession. Now, sometimes they'll win and sometimes they'll lose; they can't control the outcome. But they can learn how to deal with setbacks in a constructive way, and to be professional. They always shook hands with their opponents after the round and treated them with respect. As a result, they formed long-lasting friendships, both with their own teammates and with students they met on other teams. We had a lot of fun together.

### **To advise a team for so long, you must have felt the investment was worthwhile for you, too. Why should attorneys serve as team advisors?**

For many reasons; attorneys gain at least as much from the experience as the students. For one thing, helping the team made me a better trial lawyer. I had to understand the Rules of Evidence thoroughly myself in order to teach them to the students. And it's much harder now for young attorneys to gain trial experience, so coaching a mock trial team helps to sharpen their own trial skills. I used to encourage young attorneys in Asheboro to help with the team for that reason.

### **Do attorney advisors benefit in additional ways?**

Definitely. Advising a team helps you to meet people in the community – not just the students, but also their parents, other family members, and friends who come to watch the competitions. Some of my best friends now are parents of kids who were on the mock trial teams. And all of these connections and positive interactions can help you to build your practice; when people need an attorney, they think of you. It's important in starting out as an attorney to network with people in the community, not just with legal professionals. By helping with a local team, you build a loyal following of people who know and respect you as they see you investing so much time in their children. It even helps improve the overall community's impression of the legal profession.



### **I'd certainly agree; when I coached a team, seeing the legal professionals who gave so much time to the program made a huge impact on our parents' perceptions of attorneys.**

Exactly. We've seen parents of team members who had been big advocates of tort reform. After getting to know attorneys because of mock trial, their attitudes changed, and we could even count on them to make calls to the legislature in support of trial attorneys. Our local bar association is very involved in supporting the mock trial program, because they recognize that mock trial has such a positive impact on how attorneys are perceived in our local community. Our local judges even recognize that helping with scrimmages or at regional competitions benefits them.

### **That's interesting; how does judging mock trial rounds prove helpful to local judges?**

In mock trial the students are encouraged to argue the basis for their objections or the reasons why objections should be overruled. Listening to the students' reasoning helps refresh the judges' understanding of the rules of evidence. A number of our local judges have commented on how judging mock trial rounds has made them better judges, which benefits all of us.

### **Any final thoughts or stories you want to share?**

Yes. All trial attorneys should get involved with the mock trial program because it gives you enormous self-satisfaction to see what the kids can do. It is transformational for so many students. I remember one girl who was so nervous before her opening statement that she was throwing up before the round. But it went really well, and afterward she told me that her opening was "brilliant." Another student was incredibly shy and timid as a freshman. She went on to become an outstanding mock trial lawyer on our team. In fact, after her closing statement on the defense in a mock trial case involving alleged spousal abuse, attorney Wade Smith (who judged the round) liked her defense theme so much that he talked with her afterward. He was defending someone in a spousal abuse case, and he wanted to use her theme in his trial. His client was found not guilty! The student went on to law school and now tries cases all the time in western N.C. Mock trial participation gave her confidence and made her a completely different person. I encourage every trial attorney to get involved; you'll be glad you did!

**The CCCE wishes to extend our deepest gratitude and appreciation to Steve Schmidly for his years of dedication to his students and to the NCAJ Mock Trial Program. By his selfless service, Steve has impacted many lives across North Carolina and beyond, truly helping to "create tomorrow's leaders."**

### **CALENDAR 2013 – 2014 MOCK TRIAL SEASON**

Team Member List, Code of Ethics, Release Forms Due	Friday, January 10, 2014
Last Day to Withdraw Without Penalty	Friday, January 10, 2014
Regional Competition (Final roster due)	Saturday, February 1, 2014
Widenhouse Award materials due	Wednesday, February 19, 2014
State Finals - Campbell Law School, Raleigh	Friday – Saturday, Feb. 28 - March 1, 2014
National Championship – Madison, WI	Thursday – Sunday, May 8-11, 2014

### **THANK YOU TO OUR 2013 – 2014 OUTREACH PROGRAM SPONSORS!**

**Mary Duke Biddle Foundation**  
**Lawyers Mutual Liability Insurance Company of North Carolina**  
**North Carolina Lawyers Weekly**

**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 2013 – 2014 COMPETITION SPONSORS!**

**State Finals: Rudolf Widenhouse & Fialko**  
Asheville: Melrose, Seago & Lay, P.A.  
Charlotte: The Sumwalt Law Firm  
Durham: The Law Offices of James Scott Farrin  
Fayetteville: Britton Law, P.A.  
Greenville: Hardee & Hardee, LLP  
High Point: Crumley Roberts, LLP  
Raleigh: Twiggs Strickland & Rabenau, P.A.  
Wilmington: Shipman & Wright, LLP

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

***IT TAKES A VILLAGE . . .***

***Special thanks to Mock Trial Committee Members and Regional Coordinators who have agreed to serve for the 2013/2014 season: Mark Melrose (Asheville Regional Coordinator), Frances Knox and Paul Goodson (Charlotte Regional Coordinators), Russell Johnson and Robert Jessup (Durham Regional Coordinators), Philip Entzminger (Greenville Regional Coordinator), Rich Manger and Adrienne Blocker (High Point Regional Coordinators), Christine Scheef and Lindsey Granados (Raleigh Regional Coordinators), John H. Anderson, Jr., (Wilmington Regional Coordinator), Ken Campbell, Sheila Chavis, Laura Jenkins, Carlos Mahoney, Chris Nichols, John O'Neal, Katy Parker, Mark Sumwalt, and Kim Vukovich.***

***Special thanks also to our Site Coordinators who have agreed to serve at Regionals in the 2013/2014 season! Asheville: Cindy Bryson, Charlotte: Beverly K. Moore, Durham: Patti Clapper and Lakisha Chichester, Fayetteville: Elizabeth Owens, Greenville: Kristin Miller; High Point: Karen Parrish, Raleigh: Fran LaFrankie and Michelle Keely, Wilmington: Brandy Jo Lea.***

***\*\*If you are interested in 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).***