

## MOCK TRIAL NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2015

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

### **FOUR REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD BE COACHING MOCK TRIAL**

*By Darren C. Allen, Randolph County ADA and Perennial CCCE Mock Trial Attorney Advisor*



It's easy to understand that students benefit tremendously from the investments of their mock trial teachers and attorney advisors. Through mock trial, students learn to think critically, communicate persuasively, and work together as members of a team. But the students are not the only ones who grow as a result of their coaches' mentoring – in fact, coaching mock trial has been one of my most fulfilling activities. Here are four compelling reasons why YOU should coach a mock trial team:

**(1) It's a great way to master trial skills.**

North Carolina is teeming with new lawyers. You can't throw a rock without hitting a newly minted JD hunting for work. It's becoming an increasingly competitive, dog-eat-dog world out there. Unfortunately, many new lawyers are entering the field without the knowledge, skill, and confidence to handle the courtroom setting. Let's be honest. No matter what else you may do well, if you can't skillfully operate in the courtroom, no opposing counsel will ever take you seriously.



The best way to learn is, of course, by doing. Aside from that, the next best thing is teaching.

After graduating from Campbell Law School in 2005, I was asked to help with the Asheboro High School mock trial program. I thought, “What’s the big deal? This shouldn’t be too difficult.” I quickly learned one thing: I didn’t know as much as I thought I knew. The students started quizzing me, “Isn’t this hearsay within hearsay?” “How do I authenticate a business record?” “Why isn’t this a subsequent remedial measure?” After a few practices, I

set out to learn the rules backwards and forwards so that I could explain any question they could pose. That challenge, as much as anything, makes me the lawyer I am today.

Why is that? If you know something well enough to teach it, you know it really well. If you can explain the intricacies of the hearsay rule to fourteen year olds who speak in 140-character twitter code, you can analyze it and explain it clearly to any judge. If you can train a freshman student to cross examine an expert psychiatrist on PTSD in a mock trial case, you probably won’t have any problems when real life deals you a similar hand.

## **(2) There’s no better feeling than watching your students thrive in competition.**

On one of our Asheboro High School mock trial teams several years ago, we had a student with a troubled home life. Her stepfather was a good friend of AHS head coach Steve Schmidly, and he encouraged her to join the mock trial team to direct her energies in a positive way. From the start, Steve decided to challenge her. He assigned her an attorney role with an opening statement for the prosecution.

When time came for Regionals, she was a nervous wreck. She paced the hallways, back and forth. She ran up to her stepfather, hugging his neck, exclaiming, “I can’t do it. I just can’t do it.” She bawled and bawled and bawled. Just about ten minutes later, the round began. As the judge took the bench, the students stood. The judge asked for pre-trial introductions, and our student – adrenaline taking over – confidently introduced her team. Just moments later, she delivered a flawless opening statement.

At the end of the day, she was awarded a “Best Attorney” award by the presiding judge for that round. After grabbing the award, she walked back to join her teammates with a beaming smile. The only thing she said was, “I knew I could do it!”

That student is one of dozens of similar stories over my ten years of coaching with Asheboro High School and the Central Carolina Homeschoolers. I can’t begin to describe the experience of watching students discovering courage they didn’t think they had on their way to accomplishing things they didn’t think they could.



## **(3) It gives you an opportunity to connect with your community.**

For most prosecutors and defense lawyers, the extent of your interaction with today’s youth is juvenile court. Johnny brought drugs to school. Susie broke into her neighbor’s house and stole jewelry. Michael beat up a classmate on the bus. Occasionally, a juvenile will have that Paul-on-the-road-to-Damascus moment. Many will not. From my experience, it’s disheartening. Sometimes, it even feels hopeless.

Coaching mock trial will show you the other side of the coin. It’s refreshing to play a part in the lives of kids who will go on to be the future leaders of tomorrow, who will shape the community in years to

come. As anyone who knows me will attest, it's not unusual to hear me bragging about the successes of the kids I coached. Former AHS mocker Elizabeth Lail starred on the ABC drama "Once Upon a Time." Her classmate Lauren Karaman is a successful model in New York City changing industry standards on body image. Former CCH student Lydia Boyette received her high school and undergraduate degrees early, and is now a 20-year old med school student. About a dozen more are paying it forward by working in the education field.

Beyond that, mock trial also gives you an opportunity to develop lifelong connections, with the students' families and with others in the legal community. Mock trial parents Alice Boyette, Blair Boyette, and Maria Bailey are among my best friends on the planet. They're always willing to offer prayer and support when I need it. The support of the legal community, too, has been overwhelming. My friend and local attorney Brooke Schmidly has helped with practices. Our district court judge Rob Wilkins is always eager to preside over scrimmages to help us prepare for competitions. Both have been instrumental in the success of the Central Carolina Homeschoolers over the past few years.

#### **(4) You can steal trial strategies from your students.**

This is one you probably weren't expecting, isn't it? Yes, the students you coach will give you ideas on how to be a better lawyer. In my experience, coaching is better than any trial practices CLE.

I come from the Campbell Law school of thought on trial advocacy. Every good case theory should be topped off with a memorable trial theme. Every year, as my teams start the process of analyzing a case, the students embark on that weeks-long journey to discover the perfect trial theme. Invariably, we'll go through several different iterations, before we finally settle on one... and then change it again at the last minute. Some are so-so. Some are good. And some are absolutely steal-worthy.

I have been blessed to have coached some amazingly talented kids over the years, and they have had some awesome ideas for trial themes. AHS grad Justin Hutton employed the Biblical tale of Cain and Abel to illustrate a violent action borne of jealousy. Former CCH student Blake Davis borrowed from Staples commercials to come up with an "Easy button" theme. But the theme I go back to most now, as a prosecutor, is AHS grad Cynthia Redding's responsibility-based theme: "Sir Isaac Newton's third law of thermodynamics states that for every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction. In other words, actions have consequences."

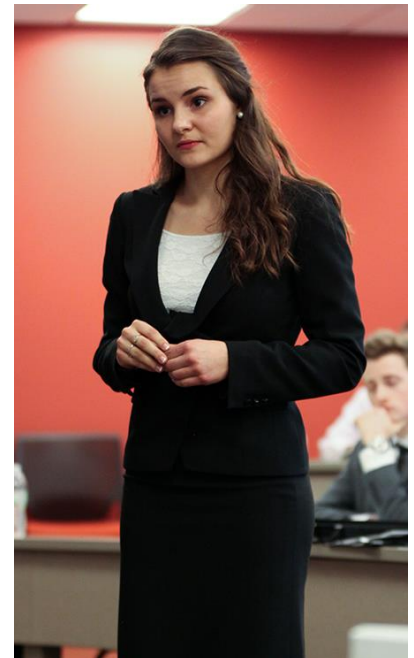
Themes aren't the only things I have stolen, either. Former CCH student Andrew Kelly, who now stars on Patrick Henry College's mock trial team, mastered the art of confident gesturing. His teammate Rachel Cline, now at King's College in New York, excelled at attorney courtroom theatrics. I am not ashamed to admit that I've borrowed from them often!

**For more information** on how you can get involved, contact CCCE Regional Coordinator Sue Johnson at [SueHeathJohnson@gmail.com](mailto:SueHeathJohnson@gmail.com).

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

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**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  
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Fayetteville: Britton Law, P.A.  
Greenville: Hardee & Hardee, LLP  
High Point: Manger Law Firm  
Raleigh: Leone Noble & Seate *and* Twigg 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**

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 Phillip 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 Byrum and Jill Gustman; ***High Point:*** Karen Parrish, ***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).***