

Mock trial event challenges students to think like lawyers

By Shari Phiel | Posted: Wednesday, December 21, 2011 4:53 pm

For only the second time since Classroom Law Project began holding mock trials, St. Helens High School sent a team of nine students to participate in the Metro Mini Mock Trial. The event was held at the Multnomah County Courthouse on Dec. 9.

"It was a great night at the courtroom. That was the general feeling by all of the participants," said teacher and coach Keith Meeuwsen.

Local attorney Mark Gordon also served as a team coach. The two previously coached a mock trial team two years ago. Meeuwsen and Gordon said they felt this year's team was much better prepared and aware of what to expect at the competition.

"The trials are designed so that either side can win and the real goal is to have students experience a trial and how they work as well as gain experience at public speaking and teamwork," said Meeuwsen.

The team participated in two civil trials, one in which they were the defense and the other in which they were the plaintiff.

Meeuwsen said the event is challenging, beginning on the first day when the team receives their trial packet. The packet includes over 100 pages of information the students have to wade through, deciding what is important and what is not.

The team began meeting in early October - often meeting two or three times a week - to prepare for the mock trial.

"The team was extremely dedicated and really put time and effort into the case and learning how to be lawyers and witnesses," said Meeuwsen.

The trial lasts approximately one hour. Three adult judges then score the teams for how they presented their information and how well they knew the law.

Gordon said the mock trial is a real "exercise for the brain," describing it is a competition that requires you to use your brain and to be quick on your feet when it comes to answering questions and asking good questions.

The team members were: Makayla Bennett, Kamron Tabor, Nathan Don, Sheyanne Green, Jenna Huffsmith, Tristan Pense, Hannah Neal, Allison Cox, and Michael Bailey.

"For the past two months they have learned how to ask questions of witnesses, object to witness

statements, fight objections with reason and give closing arguments that make you mad..." said Meeuwsen.

In the first trial, the team competed against Catlin Gable, a private school in Beaverton. For the second trial, they competed against Sunset High School, also from Beaverton.

"Mock Trial was awesome. I had a lot of fun and it taught me many things about being a lawyer. I'm very excited to do it again and have even more fun!" said Sheyanne Green.

Gordon said the students performed very well and, in some exchanges with witnesses, possibly as well as a real attorney would have.

The team is now preparing for their next competition in March. The team is sponsored by Gordon, who paid for the team's entry into the state competition in March.

"I thought it was such a great experience. I'm very happy I could be part of such a great team and I am proud of everyone!" said Allison Cox.