

Hermiston claims Mock Trial victory

HHS students next head to state competition



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by Owen R. Smith

Hermiston senior Nolan West delivers his closing arguments at the Classroom Law Project regional mock trial competition in Pendleton on Saturday.

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By Jennifer Colton

Hermiston Herald |

A murder, gambling debts and business partnerships brought local high school students to the courtroom last weekend for the 2011 Oregon High School Mock Trials regional competition in Pendleton.

The champion Hermiston students will continue their legal competition at state.

Hosted by Classroom Law Project, 2011 marks the 25th year for the annual high school competition. About 850 students competed in six separate regional competitions across the state on Saturday, according to Classroom Law Project's Melissa Logan. At the Pendleton County Courthouse, four teams — including one team each from Hermiston and Vale as well as two teams from Baker City — rotated through courtrooms to face off against each other on the case.

At the end of the day, Hermiston's team was declared the winner. Hermiston's competitors consisted of Jazmin Avalos, Josh Blake, Bianca Counihan, Sami Green, Cristal Jaime-Sanchez, Morea Lloyd, Aerial Merillat, Emily Spinden, Michael Wallace, Nolan West and Reid Worstell.

In 2010, a team from Baker High School won all three rounds of competition, including a round in which they prosecuted and rounds in which they defended the case, to beat the Hermiston, Vale and La Grande teams.

Roy Blaine, Umatilla County Circuit Court administrator, coordinated the Umatilla/Morrow event this year and described the case the students presented in court: State of Oregon v. Willy Freeman.

"This is a fictional murder. The victim's name is Devin Frost, and she freezes to death in the freezer of a restaurant she co-owns with her business partner. Though Frost had a troublesome gambling history and dealings with a loan shark, her business partner is the one charged with the murder," Blaine said. "The students have been preparing for this for some time. The Hermiston team I know has been practicing avidly with their coach."

The regional competition involved two student teams facing off, one as prosecution and one as defense, for a two-hour mock trial. Each team competed at least twice, once on either side of the case.

After three rounds, the winning team was announced.

The 11-member Hermiston team will travel to Portland for the state competition, March 11-12, and the top team from the state will have the chance to travel to Phoenix to compete at the national level.

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