

## PENDLETON

### Hermiston wins mock trial competition at courthouse



*Staff photo 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. Hermiston will move on to state next month.

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With the practiced gestures and confidence of a grizzled courtroom veteran, the defense attorney made his closing arguments then sat down to await the verdict.

After 15 minutes, Judge Sam Tucker delivered the good news: The defendant, on trial for murder, was found not guilty.

Despite the fact that the proceedings were part of the Classroom Law Project's high school mock trial competition, Tucker is a real judge in Milton-Freewater and that defense attorney, Nolan West, is a real Matlock-in-waiting.

Of four teams from Hermiston, Baker City and Vale, it was the 11-person crew from Hermiston that will move on to the state competition in Portland next month.

"I think we did very good," said West, a Hermiston High School senior. "I think the judges were really impressed with our casting of witnesses. They did an excellent job."

West, in his second year on Hermiston's mock trial team, impressed Tucker with his forceful speaking style.

West said doing the competition was a positive experience, even though it's a huge time commitment that involves many late night meetings, run-throughs and time spent with local attorney coaches.

"I love to argue. I love to talk, so it's a lot of fun," he said. "I'm definitely considering law school."

Now in its 25th year, the mock trial competition is a national event, but teams must work their way through regional and then state tournaments before hitting the big time.

“It’s a fantastic program,” said Roy Blaine, competition coordinator and Umatilla County Circuit Court trial court administrator. “It’s an opportunity for these kids to develop their speaking skills. I would compare it more to learning roles in an ad-lib play than what a regular trial would be like.”

The teams prepare for the same case and need to be able to present both sides. During the course of the day, each team competes three times but will spend at least one session on defense and prosecution.

“The case that they’re doing today is a murder, and it is a real case out of California,” Blaine said. “It’s of course been rescripted for them a little bit.”

Tucker complimented the job the high schoolers did and said when he was in high school, he doubted he would have had been able to display the abilities many of the students showed off on Saturday.

“As a judge, we see people who are not the picture of responsibility. We see youth going through our system having a lot of trouble,” Tucker said. “It is especially nice to see these young men and women who are just outstanding and they have their lives together. It just makes you have a lot more faith in our education system and our country.”

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