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York High School Takes Top Spot in NWSBA Mock Trial Invitational

Less than three points separated the two top finishers in the recent Northwest Suburban Bar Association's 2010 Mock Trial Invitational, with York Community High School ultimately coming out on top.

Not only did the Elmhurst school's Team No. 1 take first place, with 245.5 total points, it also produced the Invitational's individual winners. Jissy Cyriac won the award for Outstanding Witness, while Eric Moreau took honors as Outstanding Attorney.

St. Charles East High School in west suburban St. Charles took second place with 243 points, while Team No. 1 from Timothy Christian High School in Elmhurst was third with 235 points.

These three schools were among 20 that participated in the Invitational, held in the real-life setting of the Circuit Court of Cook County's Third Municipal District courthouse in Rolling Meadows.

Nine Cook County judges, including the Third District's presiding judge, the Honorable Joseph J. Urso, donned their robes on a Saturday and lent their time and expertise as they presided over the students' cases and provided critical feedback. More than 30 attorneys from the NWSBA and the Chicago area served as courtroom and competition judges, as well as mentors.

The students spent months preparing for the case of *Lovell v. Sainsbury*, which concerned topics front and center in students' lives, including underage drinking, school zero-tolerance policies and even texting while driving. Preparation involved learning the case's details, memorizing information, rehearsing for testimony and cross-examination by learning the legalities involved and getting into character.

"Mock Trial not only provides teens with a positive -- instead of negative -- courtroom experience, but also gives them a foundation in the law, including courtroom decorum and traditions," said attorney Jay Andrew, NWSBA member and chairman of the Mock Trial Event. "We've seen many Mock Trial participants become so enthused that they later go to law school."

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Of the 20 teams competing in the NWSBA Mock Trial event, seven are headed to the state finals in Springfield on March 13. As a result of funding cuts, the state competition was altered this year to accommodate only 12 teams: two from each of four regional contests and four “wild card” teams. The seven include the top three teams in the NWSBA Invitational, as well as Evanston Township High School, Oak Park-River Forest High School, Highland Park High School and Chicago Christian High School.

Judge Thomas Roti and the Illinois Judges Association assisted NWSBA in organizing the judges for the Mock Trial event. Judges who participated include Urso and Roti, as well as Samuel J. Betar III, Jill Cerone-Marise, Joel Greenblatt, Alfred Levinson, Daniel Locallo, Pamela Loza and Douglas Simpson.

The Invitational was sponsored by the Northwest Suburban Bar Association Foundation, with volunteers from the NWSBA, and funded in part with a grant from the Illinois State Bar Association.