



NORTHWEST SUBURBAN
BAR ASSOCIATION

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School zero-tolerance policies, underage drinking and how legal trouble can affect college scholarships will come to legal life on Feb. 27, when high school students participate in a Mock Trial competition in Rolling Meadows.

Students from approximately 20 Illinois high schools, primarily from the western and northwestern suburbs, will compete in the Northwest Suburban Bar Association's 2010 High School Mock Trial Invitational. The teens have invested hundreds of hours over several months preparing for the courtroom drama.

The legal drama unfolds from 8 a.m., to 1 p.m.

To add authenticity, the Invitational -- with attorneys from the Northwest Suburban Bar Association lending expertise and support -- is held in the Circuit Court of Cook County's Third Municipal District courthouse, 2121 Euclid Ave., in Rolling Meadows. Real-life judges who have heard real-life cases will preside as students litigate the case of Logan Lovell vs. Pat Sainsbury, on the road to competing in the Illinois State Bar Association's state tournament March 13 in Springfield.

The case involves an entirely plausible teen situation: a party with alcohol but without parents. The case then adds a high school with a zero-tolerance policy for athletes and a crash involving two young drivers with blood-alcohol levels above zero but below the legal limit. There's a college athletic scholarship possibly hanging in the balance, as the two drivers face each other in court.

The case will be heard 26 different ways, in 13 courtrooms in two rounds.

NWSBA attorneys score the competitions, and circuit and associate judges, both retired and current, from the Circuit Court of Cook County don their robes on a Saturday to preside over the cases. Judges hearing cases include Judge Joseph J. Urso, presiding judge of the Third Municipal District.

"For a lot of kids, their only contact with the legal system is a negative one, such as a speeding ticket," said attorney Jay Andrew, NWSBA's chairman of the mock trial event. "This gives them a positive experience."

Participants also learn some of the decorum and traditions attached to the practice of law, he said. Moreover, the young participants connect with people within the legal community, in a way that may change their career paths. "I participated in Mock Trial in college, and that motivated me to go to law school," Andrew said.

(more)

Donna Schecter of the Illinois State Bar Association in Springfield said participating in Mock Trial offers teens skills that will serve them well in life.

“They learn public speaking, self-confidence, how to develop strategies and how to think on their feet,” she said. “Being in the Mock Trial competition builds poise, plus the teens all learn to work as a team. They learn how to conduct themselves in the public arena and that’s going to help them in any profession they choose.”

The NWSBA and the Third District legal community as a whole take pride in having judges preside over each courtroom, which isn’t typically the case in other competitions, Andrew said. And approximately 40 attorneys from the bar association volunteer their time as well, helping with scoring and overall administration of the contest.

“It’s a great way to give back to the community, and to help introduce young people to our profession,” Andrew said.

The Invitational is sponsored by the NWSBA Foundation and the Illinois State Bar Association. For information, contact the NSWBA at 847-221-2601.