

THS Earns Second Place in Initial CSI Competition

Nine Trumbull High School students participated in the *Crime Scene Investigation Forensic Science Competition* sponsored by the Connecticut Consortium for Law & Citizenship Education. The May 28th event was hosted by the University of New Haven Henry Lee School of Forensic Sciences and Criminal Justice in West Haven.

Six Connecticut high schools were represented at the competition, including Hamden, Joel Barlow, Ridgefield, and Staples. The THS team was comprised by juniors Heather Dahlin, Nicole Friedman, Anne Hogan, Kay Labella, and Jen Shafer and seniors Andy Eckl, Evan Minkin, Mark Ragusa, and Stefanie Walker.

Upon arrival at the University of New Haven, participants attended a half hour introduction and orientation session outlining the day's events and reminding students – and teachers – about the rules of the competition before they began investigating a suspected homicide. Each school's team selected a captain (Stef Walker for THS) and divided into three sub-groups of three students each. As the event progressed, sub-groups from each school underwent a rotation of stations involving (1) physical investigation of the crime scene, (2) laboratory testing of the evidence, and (3) interviewing of the crime scene suspects.

Each sub-group worked at a different station simultaneously for approximately 30-35 minutes and then rotated to the next station in turn. In this way, all sub-groups had an opportunity to experience the totality of the investigation involving all three station responsibilities. Evan Minkin commented, "I enjoyed the hands-on experience and was impressed by the campus and the lab."

Once the activity commenced, teachers were not permitted to have any contact with the students as they went about their investigation. As student sub-groups proceeded through the investigation process, a competition judge accompanied each group and confidentially scored them with regard to the methods/techniques they employed, as well as the success and thoroughness of their approach. This was done at all three stations.

Upon completion of the rotations, each high school team reunited and the sub-groups collaborated during a two-hour working lunch in order to confer on their investigations and develop a PowerPoint presentation summarizing their work. Each team independently presented their findings and conclusions.

The THS team's presentation, which included digital photos, measurements taken of/at the crime scene and a plaster cast made of the suspected perpetrator's sneaker footprint, was conducted by the team in front of a panel of judges and their teachers (Mr. Eric August and Mr. Douglas Winters). Each member of the team participated in the methodical and convincing presentation. In response, several judges asked questions of the team and received immediate answers, most of which were consistent with the evidence observed and analyzed and in alignment with their conclusions as to who committed the crime and as to how it was committed.

Judges scored the competing teams in four areas: (1) physical investigation of the crime scene, (2) laboratory analysis of the evidence, (3) interviewing of the crime scene suspects, and (4) presentation of their results and conclusions. By the end of the competition, the judges announced that the Trumbull team came in second only to Ridgefield. The point-spread between the two teams was close; THS scoring in the low 90's and RHS scoring in the higher 90's. Judges also mentioned that none of the other four competing teams scored close to the top two finishers.

Trumbull's team members deserve recognition and congratulations on their notable accomplishment, especially in view of the fact that THS had not participated before and they prepared for this competition in only one month's time. With no official coursework in Forensic Science – something each of the other participating schools has – THS students voluntarily met once a week for four weeks with Science teachers Mr. Jordan Miller and Mr. Winters as well as Mr. August of the Social Studies Department to prepare for the competition.

The students' interest, curiosity, and motivation in the subject, serious-minded focus and perseverance regarding the challenge before them, and the analytically-detailed manner in which they approached this commitment attest to their success. In short, the team represented Trumbull High very well and left a positive and favorable impression on the judges.

Stef Walker reflected, "The forensic competition was an excellent experience in the area of laboratory science and crime scene investigation. I wish I could have done this more in my high school career." Anne Hogan added, "It was fun working with students from other schools, especially the kids from Staples. It was a good branching out experience for THS."