

## **Mock Trial Team Excels in First Year**

Mock Trial debuted at THS in 2008 – 2009 as part of the Honors Justice and Law curriculum. The students were able to reinforce learning in the class with the practical experience provided by the mock trial forum.

Team advisor and former attorney Eric August served as the guide for this team. Mr. August, who spent two and a half years practicing law before leaving the practice to join the education field, provided great mentorship for this ambitious group of budding attorneys, which was comprised of fifteen juniors and seniors: Seniors – Paul Basel, Andy Eckl, Zach Goldberg, Lily Malota, Evan Minkin, Richard Shi, and Stefanie Walker. Juniors – Anne Hogan, Sam Johnson, Sahtia Rivers, Matt Romano, Amanda Sahley, Barney Sweeney, Scott Von Stein, and Ben Woessner.

The team competed in the Connecticut High School Mock Trial Competition sponsored by the Connecticut Consortium for Law and Citizenship Education (CCLCE). The High School Mock Trial Program, begun in 1976, is co-sponsored by the CCLCE and the Connecticut Bar Association. Throughout its 33-year history, thousands of students and their teachers have participated. The program included upwards of 700 students from approximately fifty-two Connecticut high schools in 2008 – 2009.

In preparation for this year's competition, the students took part in the Bob Boland Workshop sponsored by the CCLCE in February. Here they were able to access the minds of veteran attorneys and seasoned litigators from throughout the state. This workshop was a rousing success and helped pave the way for a successful first season.

Furthering its preparation, the Mock Trial Team sponsored the First Annual Night of Law where, broken into subteams, the students competed against each other to fine-tune their arguments for the following week's regional competition. Held in the Trumbull Town Hall Council chambers, the practice competition had Board of Education Chairman Steven Wright and fellow attorney Jim Nugent serving as the honorary judges. It was a very successful event as the students were able to hone their skills.

This year's Mock Trial case dealt with premise liability, presenting a situation in which a variety of nettlesome issues surfaced after teenagers started an underage casino on the property of an elderly farmer. Each six-member team, comprised of three attorneys and three witnesses, had to successfully navigate both the plaintiff's side and the defense side in order to secure a trip to the competition's next round. THS fielded two separate teams in the competition, with each side being prepared to tackle both sides of the case.

The students performed admirably in the first round of the competition, held at Stamford Superior Court on March 27, going 3 – 1. The team dropped its only trial

to a very experienced Fairfield Prep team. For a first-year program to be named Regional Champs and advance to the second round was in and of itself a great accomplishment. After the trials were over, the students received invaluable feedback from experienced attorneys from all over the state of Connecticut. The THS team consistently received high praise for the knowledge of the facts and polished style of litigating.

The team's goal of advancing to the state finals fell short when it lost to a very talented and experienced Fairfield Warde/Ludlowe team in the April 27 quarterfinals held at Westhill High School in Stamford. Advisor Eric August reflected, "I knew all along the one thing we would lack was experience, but hoped we could make it up in preparation and talent. Well, we ran into a team that was just as talented and just as prepared with four seniors who had been doing this for four years."

Summing up the year, Mr. August expressed his satisfaction and thanks, "This year's team accomplished much and put THS Mock Trial on the map. It was a successful year and the students had a great time. Many special thanks to the ACE Foundation for their help and support the whole year through. We're looking forward to another successful year in 2009 - 2010."