

MCBF Supports Mock Trial Through the Monterey County Lyceum

“All rise!” bellows the fourteen-year-old bailiff, and thus the mock trial begins. This year, the Monterey County Lyceum made it possible for 7 local high schools to participate in the Mock Trial Program. The Monterey County Bar Foundation was pleased to provide funding to assist the Lyceum in bringing this amazing educational program to our County.

Teach Democracy, a very creative group, writes up a fact pattern each year, featuring a circumstantial case for the students to try. The materials come with 4 witness statements in support of the prosecution's theory of the case and 4 witness statements which help the defense. The materials also include a limited legal library from which the students argue a pretrial motion about evidence which may or may not be allowed in, dependent on whether it was obtained illegally.

High school students throughout the state begin working in early September to learn the case and learn the law, with the goal of the students playing all of the parts in the trial except for the judge. They spend hours each week drafting opening statements, composing direct and cross examinations, learning the exceptions to the hearsay rule, and practicing the delivery of their case.

Part civics lesson and part public speaking class, the students work really hard, and they learn to critically analyze materials they are reading, think on their feet, and work as a team to present cohesive theories of their case. These are life skills which the students benefit from having no matter what career path they end up taking. The top team in each county competes at the state level, and the top team in the state competes in a national competition.

For the County competition, Joyce Breckenridge of the Lyceum pays Teach Democracy for the fees for each school to participate in the program. She needed judges for 17 trials and 51 scoring attorneys to judge the students' performances. Ms. Breckenridge really appreciates the support of the MCBF as it helps to pay the fees and for awards for the participating schools and students. Ms. Breckenridge said her favorite thing about the program is watching students answer questions from the judge. She said, “The students always impress me with their courage and their fast thinking.”

Our county competition took place between January 27th - February 8th. Carmel High School beat out Pacific Grove, Santa Catalina, Rancho San Juan, Salinas High, Palma, and Gonzales High School. For more information about the Lyceum's mock trial program, please see the Lyceum's website: www.lyceum.org.