

Night Court At Valleyview Middle School

Denville, NJ — On June 11' 2013, almost two dozen Valleyview Middle Schools Students went to court. Well, sort of. The Valleyview Middle School's Mock Trial club once again held their own "Night Court at Valleyview" mock trials. During the course of the school year, the students created and wrote the facts of each case as well as the testimony of the witnesses for both sides of the argument. On that Tuesday evening they presented each case to a jury consisting of their peers, parents, faculty and administration.

This is the 5th year in a row that the 7th and 8th grade students of Valleyview Middle School have participated in a New Jersey State Bar Foundation promoted program and contest, **Law Adventure**. The program is designed to foster critical thinking skills and to teach students about the legal system in New Jersey. This year the students were asked to create these trials based on one of two themes: (a) social media, or (b) motor vehicle issues. The Law Adventure program provides the themes and a precise format, but students must create their cases entirely "from scratch."

For both themes, the Valleyview students created facts and cases which were pertinent in today's world. In the social media case, the students created a fact pattern in which a girl, whose boyfriend broke up with her, decided to write disparaging remarks on a social media page which resulted in the ex-boyfriend being fired from his job. The motor vehicle "case" was about who was more at fault for an accident which caused injuries. In this case, the injured plaintiff was "jay walking" while listening to music through headphones, when the defendant hit her while allegedly violating cell phone usage law while driving. The focus of this "case" was the legal theory of comparative negligence. In both cases, the jury found in favor of the plaintiff.

The students were mentored by Mark Hoffman, social studies teacher and faculty advisor of the Valleyview Mock Trial Club, and by attorney Timothy J. Ford, Esq., an associate with Denville based law firm, Einhorn, Barbarito, Frost & Botwinick, PC, who volunteered his time several days each month. Mark Hoffman founded, and has been a driving force behind, the Mock Trial Club for five years.

Many of the other schools who decide to take part in this program have actual Mock Trial/Debate Classes, but Valleyview Middle School does not. If they wanted to participate they were going to have to do it as an after-school club in which the parents of the students would have to fund the program. However, thanks to a generous donation from Einhorn, Barbarito, Frost & Botwinick, PC, a full service law firm, the students were allowed to participate cost free. Mr. Ford explained that the firm supported this program because it helped these students to “develop both their creative and critical thinking abilities.”

Over 100 different cases were submitted to the state wide competition but only a small number were chosen to present their cases at the New Jersey Law Center in New Brunswick. While Valleyview's students were not chosen, both Mr. Hoffman and Mr. Ford organized the evening's “night court” because they felt that the students work should be “litigated” in public. At the end of the evening's “trials,” when the students were presented with certificates of participation, Mr. Ford said: “This is my third year as an attorney mentor of the Valleyview Mock Trial Club, and it's just as enjoyable as it was the first year. I am proud of the students who worked hard all year.”