

Mock Trial is Real Experience



By Thomas L. Cuni

We are all too busy, often so busy that there seems to be little time for activities outside of work and our family obligations. The Mock Trial Program that the Cincinnati Bar Association sponsors each year provides opportunities for attorneys to do a valuable community service with a relatively small time commitment.

The Mock Trial Program is designed to provide high school students with a practical exposure to some aspects of the practice of law and the judicial system. The program is designed as a competition between teams. The teams are assigned opposing sides in a hypothetical controversy, generally with two students on each team taking the role of counsel for a party and three students prepared as witnesses. Two of the three witnesses are called at the trial. The witnesses learn a set of facts about which they will testify. There is no script but the witnesses must stick to the facts assigned to them as witnesses.

The mock trial process leaves the students ample room for creativity and the use of good trial skills. I have served on several of the three-judge panels which hear and judge the team performances. The hard work and the preparation of the young men and women who participate in the competition is evident. Also, it is just fun to help with such an interesting exercise.

I am not sure if schools still offer what I knew as "civics classes," but the Mock Trial Program is clearly a lesson in civics. As we know, there is often

significant public misconceptions about the manner in which our judicial system is designed to operate. The Mock Trial Program is a tremendous lesson for the students and their parents about the ideals and aspirations of the legal system in this country.

As always, I have a pitch to make. The Mock Trial Program is a wonderful opportunity for attorneys to participate in a meaningful community service with a relatively modest commitment of time. Serving as a judge on a three-judge panel does not require that you have had trial experience. One of the three panel members is appointed to rule on the objections and procedural motions and the whole panel scores the competition. It is not a particularly stressful job to be on the panel, but it is an enjoyable experience. There is a brief introductory class that you may attend to learn about the mock trial rules, but it is not mandatory. The actual time commitment

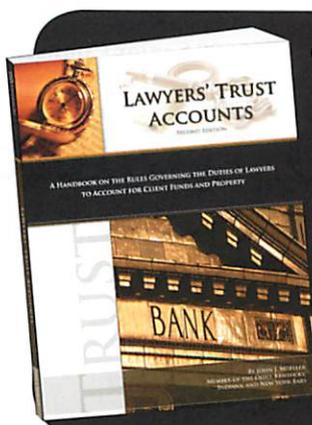
is several hours of one evening of your life. See page 37 to find out more.

If you elect to participate, I promise you that you will come away from the experience with a renewed sense of optimism about the young men and women of our community and a renewed sense of pride in our judicial system.

If, after your initial exposure to the program, you are interested in doing more, there are opportunities to serve as legal advisors to a team. Cindy Fazio wrote about her very gratifying experiences as a legal advisor in her article in the November 2008 edition of the *CBA Report*. You can re-read her perspective at www.cincybar.org under For Our Members.

I hope that you will consider participating in this fine activity which your Bar Association supports. 

Cuni is 2009-10 president of the Cincinnati Bar Association.



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