

## **West Virginia Law Adventure**

One activity the Young Lawyers Section Executive Committee has been privileged to be involved with is the West Virginia Law Adventure mock trial program sponsored by the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia. This program, adopted in part by permission of the New Jersey Bar Foundation, who sponsors a similar award-winning program in that state, features middle school students actually preparing trial transcripts and then subsequently performing them in front of local judges around the State. The program in West Virginia was launched originally as part of a five county pilot project by the Court. The program has slowly been expanded in each subsequent year and is now available generally to any counties and schools in the state who are interested in participating.

The program commences each year with the participating students selecting from one of several case packets that contain a fact pattern, a West Virginia criminal law statute implicated by the fact pattern and a set of assumptions that the students must make in preparing their transcripts. Students then work to prepare an actual trial court transcript based upon this provided information and law. Once completed, the students will perform this trial transcript in front of a circuit court judge, family court judge or magistrate in their local counties. Once their transcripts are performed initially in their local counties, they are sent to the West Virginia State Bar where two winners are selected and invited to perform their transcripts in the Supreme Court's chambers in front of at least one current Justice of the Court.

Members of the Young Lawyers Section Executive Committee have served in the capacity of judges for this process for the State Bar each year the Court has sponsored the program. In addition, at the Court's request this year, the Committee drafted three new case packets for use in the program to "refresh" its content and plans to periodically develop new

material in the future to help the program continue to develop and evolve and also to ensure that the students participating in the program each year remain challenged by it.

The Young Lawyers Section has been pleased to participate in this very worthwhile program since its inception. It should help provide participating students insight into both the actual workings of the court system in West Virginia and how the judges and lawyers who are the officers of it make it work. As Chief Justice Robin Jean Davis has said about the Program, “the real court system is not like it is often portrayed on television. West Virginia judges are not like Judge Judy, and real cases are not as black and white as they are on Law and Order. My fellow justices and I hope that by making students think through the arguments of the prosecution and defense in one mock case they will come away with a genuine understanding and appreciation of the American justice system and our Constitutional protections.”

I would like to acknowledge the hard work of Patrick Lefebure and the rest of the subcommittee for the Young Lawyers Section in developing the new factual scenarios for use in the program as well as the time they will spend judging the numerous participants when the transcripts are completed early in 2011. Kandi Greter and everyone else at the Supreme Court who are directly involved with the program also deserve credit for their hard work in making the program a success. Helping to develop this genuine understanding and appreciation of West Virginia’s court system is a worthy supplement to the participants’ civic educations.