

They Were't Supposed to Win

By Ralph Schaefer - 3/5/2007

When 12 students from Tulsa County went to moot court competition, they brought experiences that competitors didn't have.

That is because most were from Lakeside Home and they only recently were defendants appearing before the judge, prosecutors and had defense lawyers working on their behalf. They had been sent to the home to have supervision away from their families.

That didn't wasn't an obstacle to the Lakeside team.

They took on all high schools in the state and were eliminated from the finals by .04 percent, just edged out by Broken Arrow High School.

Both teams were tied, said District Judge Daman Cantrell team facilitator. Moot Court judges had to fine details to determine the tie-breaking points.

Cantrell, who has led volunteer attorneys in developing the Lakeside squad during the past four years, points with pride to the team's accomplishments. With the exception of the first year, Team Lakeside has been in the top 25 percent of the competition. The last two years they have outscored 80 percent of the high schools in the state.

Most team members are known only by their first names, Frederick, J.R., Marissa, Jessica, Nikki, Chelsea, Orion, Kayla and Ayla.

Three participants, Audre Cantrell, Judge Cantrell's daughter, April Phillips and Jennifer Healey are not Lakeside Home members, but were invited to participate.

Cantrell calls himself the facilitator and quickly credits Dwain Shaw, Lucy Kroblin, Justin Munn, Kelly Smakel, Laurie Phillips, Valerie Evans, Mike Ashworth, Roy Tucker, Judge Mary Fitzgerald, Eirca Dorwart, Pansy Shrier, Stan Monroe, Molly Bircher, Jim Fatigante, Steve Modovsky, and Larry Murphy with doing the actual training. Deirdre Dexter, acting city attorney, was unable to participate this year.

Rather than being a burden, taking away from family and judicial responsibilities, Cantrell sees the Lakeside Moot Court team that represents Tulsa County as an opportunity to give back to the community.

"I always have likened the competition to David vs Goliath," he said. Most people like to root for the Davids as the underdog.

Lakeside's participants vary from 13 to 18 years old and perform in a variety of roles. The more outgoing are judges, prosecutors and defense attorneys. The more inward students serve as a bailiff or court reporter.

No one knows the participant's backgrounds, Cantrell continued. After the competition they learn that only recently many of Lakeside's team had been on the receiving end of the judicial system.

One Lakeside participant acknowledged "they were juvenile delinquents," something the Moot Court Judges and other team captains found difficult to believe.

Cantrell and the team of attorneys believe their young people are capable of accomplishing many things and have the potential to do great, positive things with their lives. They just need a chance.

It is wonderful to see these young people so confident, successful and happy, he said. Some of their faces reflected absolute glee at their accomplishments. Lakeside is a school with less than 25 students. All have had major difficulties that caused them to be placed in the legal system.

It is a unique opportunity and challenge to coach these young people, Cantrell continued. Many don't have positive life experiences, and in some instances, their families have given up on them and turned to the courts for help.

Participation on the Lakeside Moot Court team offers the young people an opportunity to be away from the campus. They travel to Catoosa High School where they practice against that school's team. Another time they traveled to Stillwater and later stopped at Eskimo Joe's.

The Moot Court competition is well received by officials who now look forward to November and the arrival of the coaches for another round of activity, Cantrell added.

Training goes beyond courtroom presentations.

The first lesson the young participants learn is to respect others, he said. When competition begins, they understand they must be respectful of other teams regardless of the outcome. Those lessons are taught in a variety of ways.

One is by taking them to a restaurant where they know they must use good manners and be respectful of the wait staff and others. That respect is something they can carry forward the rest of their lives.

Team members also learn how to fill in quickly.

Cantrell said one girl got a sore throat the day of competition. Another team member learned her part during the lunch hour and went on to do quite well during the event. The kids know they are expected to do well.

Sometimes it takes "special motivation" to entice the team members.

Shaw worked with two young people and their reward was a trip to McDonald's. It worked so well that one young man went through his entire presentation without a script, something unheard of in preliminary competition.

Scripts generally aren't used in state events and never in national competitions.

Since the program has completed its fourth year, Cantrell and the other coach participants have seen some young people start their own lives outside court jurisdiction.

One young woman has obtained her own apartment and has started college.

For Cantrell, working with the young people has proved exciting and it has been an opportunity to give back to the community.

But he also feels he has been a recipient because of the enthusiasm and determination of the young people.

He probably saw the value of the Moot Court team's efforts when, after winning the second round, one of the Lakeside participants proudly said "we are just juvenile delinquents."

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