

# THE STATE BAR OF NEVADA'S LAW RELATED EDUCATION PROGRAM:

## THE QUEST FOR DIVERSITY IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION STARTS IN THE CLASSROOM

BY MELINDA CATREN, NEVADA LAWYER COORDINATOR



One fundamental way to grow diversity in Nevada's legal community is to reach out to young people who might not otherwise choose to pursue legal careers. The State Bar of Nevada's Law Related Education (LRE) program does this by supporting programs centered on understanding the citizen's role in government, civil rights and the legal process and, through these programs, bringing Nevada students from every demographic and ethnic background into contact with legal professionals

Through these programs, children whose parents may never have finished high school are given the opportunity to work with volunteer attorneys to put together and present their own cases in Mock Trial competitions; they are encouraged

to discuss the Constitution and what it means to them, through the *We the People* and Law Day programs; they learn to be effective citizens, with a real influence on their own communities, by participating in Project Citizen.

The results speak for themselves. Statistics show that school children who participate in such programs are more likely, not only to finish high school, but to go on to seek higher education. With recent government cuts, these programs rely more and more on support and funding from alternate sources.

Here is a look at some of LRE's annual programs:

*The State Bar of Nevada's LRE section helps children grades K-12 learn about the law, the legal system and their rights and responsibilities through activities that promote cooperative learning, problem solving and positive interactions between students and members of the legal community.*



## Law Day



**Students attend the teleconferenced discussion for Law Day Live, 2011**

This annual program takes place from late April to early May. It is designed to recognize the legal profession. Activities are developed around a nationally selected theme and vary from year to year. Law Day events often include poster contests, mock trial demonstrations and school visits by volunteer attorneys. Law Day Live draws participation from Supreme Court justices and usually features a teleconferenced discussion involving students from across Nevada. Law Day events are promoted in Nevada by the state bar's LRE coordinator, the bar's Young Lawyer's Section, local county bar associations and school and community groups.

## High School Mock Trial Competition



**Volunteers watch as student teams compete in the Mock Trial state finals**



**◀ LRE Coordinator Kathleen Dickinson greets volunteer judge Mike Davidson**

The State Bar of Nevada works with area schools and educators to coordinate the High School Mock Trial Competition. In this competition, teams of six to eight students take on the roles of lawyers and witnesses in a mock trial. Volunteer Nevada attorneys and teachers

coach the teams as they prepare for competitions, which are held at the district, state and national levels. This program offers a unique opportunity for attorneys; many of the more

affluent schools will have alumni as volunteer coaches, while some of the schools in more economically challenged districts have a difficult time finding coaches.

## *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution*

**Dean White, Chief Justice Saitta, attorney Adkins and Assemblyman Stewart provide feedback to Canyon Springs students**



**▶ Canyon Springs students participate in *We the People***



The primary goal of *We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution* is to promote civic competence and responsibility among the nation's upper elementary and secondary students. Participating students study the U.S. Constitution, learning about its creation and how it relates to current events. They then present their knowledge in hearings before panels of volunteer judges.

## Goldilocks: Trial of the Century

Presented by the state bar's Young Lawyers Section, Goldilocks: The Trial of the Century gives fourth graders an introduction to the workings of the legal system. Lawyer volunteers visit schools and screen a video presentation of Goldilocks' fictional trial (for her infractions against the three bears) for students. The screening is followed by a discussion covering the various elements of a jury trial. Students are then asked to act as jury members and decide on a verdict.



**Goldilocks participants from the YLS. Left to right, Brian Gonsalves, Justina Caviglia and Stephanie Allen**

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## Project Citizen

This civic education program is for students in sixth through ninth grades. Students explore public policy in relation to identified problems in their community, and prepare a portfolio describing the problem, identifying alternative solutions, selecting the best resolution and formulating an action plan. They then make presentations that are evaluated by educators and members of the legal community. This program is beneficial to all participants, but most notably, it teaches young people who might normally feel



**Principal Dr. Maria Chairez, fourth grade students and teachers Barbara Criswell and Monteen Javanes present Project Citizen Anti Bullying portfolio April 2012.**

disenfranchised by their socioeconomic backgrounds that they have productive roles to fill in society and can effect positive change.

The State Bar of Nevada encourages all members to find a way to get involved in LRE. Whether you can give a few hours a year or donate every other weekend, there

is a program that will fit your busy schedule. Not only does lawyer participation encourage personal growth in children and diversity in the field, it is also an enriching, fulfilling experience for the lawyer volunteer! ■

### GET INVOLVED!

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

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