

# High School Mock Trial Celebrates 40 Years!

## The History of the Texas High School Mock Trial Competition

BY JUDY YARBRO

In an effort to better engage the nation's youth in the law, many law-focused education programs began throughout the country in the 1970s.

In Texas, one such program came to be known as Law in a Changing Society, a curriculum for elementary, junior, and senior high school classrooms. One of the activities was a mock trial, conducted in high school classrooms in the Dallas Independent School District. The classroom mock trial was such a success that in 1979, a citywide competition was conducted by the Dallas Bar Association's Law in a Changing Society Committee (now the Mock Trial Committee) and DISD. The positive responses of students, educators, and attorneys alike prompted the Dallas Bar Association to organize a competition on the state level; and in June 1980, four teams participated in the first statewide competition.

There is no doubt that Texas was on the cutting edge of state mock trial competitions and in the ensuing years was instrumental as a resource and model for other state tournaments. Program alumni have gone on to become everything from attorneys to state senators, doctors, and teachers—many now coaching mock trial!

Throughout the life of the program, the Texas High School Mock Trial Competition has touched more than 250,000 high school students across Texas, and awarded over \$400,000 in scholarships

throughout the state in district and regional tournaments and at the state finals. This year over 850 attorneys and law students volunteered for the program as either coaches or judges statewide. We partnered with 45 organizations including 18 local bar associations. In 2019, the Texas High School Mock Trial Competition marks its 40th year and the Dallas Bar Association continues to be the proud sponsor of the program.

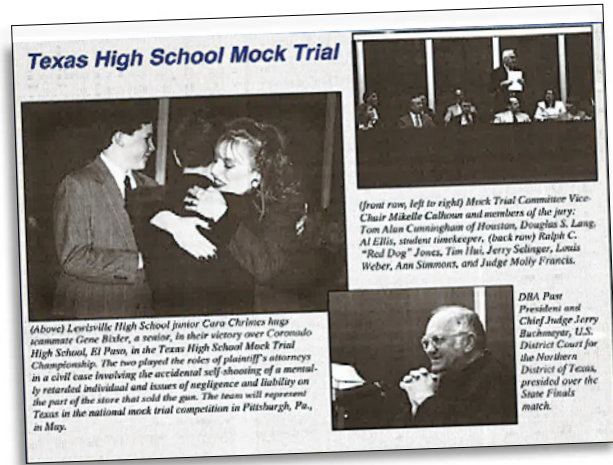
Here's how it happened in Texas:



**1979** DISD city-wide competition held; first in the nation. Among the top winning teams of the competition was the Transportation Magnet. It was inspiring to the attorneys to see the development of the students who participated in mock trial, even when the students were not drawn from a forensic background or class.

**1980** The success of Dallas ISD competition led to the idea of a state-wide competition (among the first in the nation); teams composed of 4-6 students prepare both sides of an original and hypothetical case drafted by DBA attorneys. This year marked the 1st Annual State-wide competition which was held in June; four teams were invited to participate. One of those teams was Amarillo High School. The attorney coach was Nancy Garms for whom the State Bar Award for Law Related Education was named.

**1981** Offices for the statewide program were opened at the DBA headquarters; District competitions held throughout the state, 17 winning teams advanced to the state tournament; program



Texas High School Mock Trial

(Above) Leeville High School junior Cura Christus sings to Gene Bisher, a senior, in their victory over Coronado High School, El Paso, in the Texas High School Mock Trial Championship. The two played the roles of plaintiff's attorney in a civil case involving the accidental self-shooting of a mental patient at a store that sold the gun. The teams will represent Texas in the national mock trial competition in Pittsburgh, Pa., in May.

(From row, left to right) Mock Trial Committee Vice-Chair Mikelle Callahan and members of the jury: Tom Alan Cunningham of Houston, Douglas S. Lang, Al Ellis, student timekeeper, (back row) Ralph C. "Red Dog" Jones, Tim Hui, Jerry Selinger, Louis Weber, Ann Simmons, and Judge Molly Francis.

DBA Past President and Chief Judge Jerry Bachmayer, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas, presided over the State Finals match.

was recognized with the prestigious State Bar of Texas Award of Merit.

**1982** Regional competitions, organized through the Texas Education Agency's Regional Service Centers, regional winners advanced to Dallas for state competition.

**1983** By 1983 the state program experienced growth from four (4) schools to over 150 school districts; The Dallas Morning News underwrites both City and Region 10 scholarship winners. Winning teams advanced to State.

**1985** Texas and Oklahoma join with six other states to form an All-States Competition (now the National High School Mock Trial Tournament). Texas' championship team, Corpus Christi's Richard King High School, competed in the national tournament in Lincoln, Nebraska, winning the national title.

**1986** For the first time, all 20 regions participated in regional tournaments, sending winning teams to State. Size of teams was expanded to 6-10 students with three witness roles and three attorneys per side in addition to a team timekeeper.

**1988** Dallas hosted the national All-States tournament with 24 states participating. The Dallas County Commissioners' Court adopted a Resolution acknowledging the participants in the tournament and declaring May 2, 1988 as National Mock Trial Day in Dallas. The Texas championship team, Westlake High School in Austin, won 2nd Place.

**1990** Texas High School Mock Trial Competition continued to expand throughout the 90s and the State Championship team advanced to the national level of competition. Texas' championship team, Richard King High School, won 2nd Place in both 1991-1992, and in 1999; the Texas' Tivy High School in Kerrville, with an undefeated record, placed 3rd in the nation.

**1997** State championship team, Lake Highlands High School, won 3rd Place at the National tournament in Nashville, Tennessee. Steven Russell served as an attorney coach for the team.

**2007** Nineteen years after the first national tournament was held in Dallas, the DBA once again hosted the National High School Mock Trial Championship. Forty (40) teams participated with one being



## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

TEXAS HIGH SCHOOL MOCK TRIAL NEEDS VOLUNTEERS!

### HOW YOU CAN HELP

- **Coach a Team:** Help a team prepare for competition by meeting with them during practices.
- **Tabulations:** Work with Chair to learn tabulation and pairing methods. Advises Chair on concerns or inaccuracies. Will assist in overseeing scoring process and volunteer judges.
- **Score a Competition:** We need you! It takes over 200 attorneys to score a day of competition. No litigation experience required!



Questions? Contact the State Coordinator at [texasmocktrial@dallasbar.org](mailto:texasmocktrial@dallasbar.org) or call 214-220-7484 [www.texashighschoolmocktrial.com](http://www.texashighschoolmocktrial.com)

from South Korea. For the second time, the DBA received State Bar of Texas awards in relation to the mock trial program. Texas' championship team, Richardson High School (incidentally, one of the four teams in the first state competition in 1980) placed 8th overall at the national tournament.

**2008** A Professionalism award was created as a part of the state tournament, funded by the Gwin Family Foundation. This award is presented to the team voted to be the most professional both inside and outside of the courtroom by the other competing teams. This award is now named after now retired State Coordinator, Judy Yarbrow.

**2017** A Courtroom Artist competition was incorporated into the Texas High School Mock Trial Competition. The artist, an 11th member of the team, sketches a scene of the trial during the tournament competition. As its own contest, the artist can qualify for state outside of their own team. In 2018, our state winning artist won 1st Place at Nationals.

"I always desired to be an attorney, but never had the opportunity to go on to law school after college. As a mom of 5 children, I am thrilled that my two eldest sons are pursuing a degree in law themselves in the future, and are excited about mock trial. We have wanted to organize a team for our school for the past two years, and finally have enough students to build a team! Go Veritas Classical Academy Lions!"  
 – Krista Ireland Parma, 1991-1993



"High school mock trial changed my life forever in too many ways that I can count. I attended summer mock trial camps in high school, coached high school teams both while in college and in law school. I have judged competitions. But most importantly, I have been honored to touch other students' lives as much as my coaches touched mine ten years ago. I have now written recommendation letters to students, and have gone on to prosecute murderers and achieve great things as a prosecutor. I am passionate about my work, and will always feel like I have the job of my dreams. I can only hope to inspire others the same way."  
 – Laura Andrade, 2004 - 2007

## Mock Trial Leaders & 2018 Review

### Program Leaders/Heroes

*This list represents only a few of the many "heroes" of the Mock Trial Program*

- John Booth** – First Chair of the Committee; instrumental in initiating the city and state mock trial competition
- Hon. Jerry Buckmeyer**
- Al Ellis** – Coached 1979 Team, Law in Changing Society Chair, taught the curriculum
- Gordon Carpenter** – Responsible for the DBA receiving the Hatton W. Sumner Grant
- Judge Nikki DeShazo** – Chair of the First National Tournament in 1988
- Steve Gwinn** – Committee Chair, 2004 – Present
- Ralph C. "Red Dog" Jones** – Responsible for keeping the mock trial program under the DBA
- David Kent** – Long time Vice-Chair and helped push law related education programming
- Steve Miller** – Head case writer who then served on the national board for mock trial
- Prater Monning** – Over 25 years of service to the program as an attorney adviser, case writer, and committee chair
- Frank C. Moore** – brought Law in the Changing Society (an ABA program) to the DBA then to DISD
- Randall Moore** – Longtime Chair of the Mock Trial Committee
- Hon. Lana Myers** – Long time Chair and Presiding Judge for Final Round
- Steve Russell** – 20 years of service to the program as an attorney adviser and committee vice-chair
- Mike Stewart** – Teacher from Woodrow Wilson High School; now have the Mike Stewart cup that rotates to every DISD Mock Trial Winner
- Lynnette Sullivan** – DISD administrator that helped start the first tournament along with John Booth
- Louis Weber** – Original member of the Law in Changing Society Committee who pushed programming statewide
- Judy Yarbro** – State Coordinator of the program from 1982-2007

### 2018 Partners & Sponsors throughout the State

- American Board Of Trial Advocates
- AT&T
- Austin Bar Association
- Baylor Law School
- Blank Document
- Conroe Municipal Court
- Corpus Christi Bar Association
- Dallas Bar Foundation
- Dallas County Government
- Dallas Hispanic Bar Association
- Dallas ISD
- Dallas Trial Lawyers Association
- Dallas Women's' Lawyers Association
- El Paso Bar Association
- El Paso District Attorney's Office
- Encase Legal
- Espinosa Law Firm
- George Allen Sr. Courts Building
- Harris County Criminal Lawyers Association
- Hidalgo County Bar Association
- J.L. Turner Legal Association
- Jefferson County Young Lawyers Association
- Lubbock Area Bar Association
- Lubbock County Courthouse
- Lubbock County Young Lawyer's Association
- Lubbock ISD
- McLennan County Young Lawyer's Association
- Midland County
- Midland County Bar Association
- Peter Malouf
- Plunkett Griesenbeck
- Preferred Counsel
- Region 10 Education Service Center
- Region 6 Education Service Center
- Region 7 Education Service Center
- Region One Education Service Center
- San Antonio Bar Association
- Southern Methodist University
- Dedman School of Law
- Tarrant County Bar Association
- Tarrant County Bar Foundation
- Tarrant County Commissioner's Court
- Tarrant County Sherriff's Department
- The International Association of Defense Counsel (IADC)
- The Robert A. and Marianne S. Gwinn Family Foundation
- Tom Goranson
- Tort and Insurance Practice Section (TIPS)
- UNT Dallas College of Law

Over 45 Partners!  
 Over 18 local bar associations!  
 Over 850 attorneys and law students volunteered for the high school mock trial program statewide for the 2018-2019 school year.