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GUERIN PREP NOLAN SCHOLARS AMONG THE TOP SCHOOLS IN STATE MOCK TRIAL

In only its second year of participating in the Illinois State Bar Association's High School Mock Trial Program, the team of Nolan Scholars from Guerin College Preparatory High School finished among the top eight schools out of a field of 47 teams at the state-wide competition held in March at the University of Illinois in Springfield. In the final round of eight, Guerin Prep competed against the team that took first place in state.

Additionally, three of the Guerin Prep's team were named for outstanding achievement. Junior Melissa Cyrus of Chicago was recognized as an outstanding mock trial lawyer; Junior Jenna Zacharias of Elmwood Park and Sophomore Andrew Rangel of Chicago were named outstanding witnesses.

Students acted as attorneys and witnesses in this program, which teaches about the American justice system. The Illinois State Bar Association has sponsored the mock trial program for high school students annually since 1984. This year's mock trial was based on the facts in a hypothetical case *People v. Grey* involving an arson.

At the trial, seven members of a school's team, plus three alternates, are able to participate. Guerin Prep actually prepared 15 students for the event, all of whom are involved in the Nolan Scholars Program, a new academic program now in its third year at the school. The themes for the sophomore Nolan Scholars are the law and medicine.

In addition to Cwyrus, Rangel and Zacharias, this year's team included Juniors Paula Kopec, Iwona Lazarz, Vanessa Negron, Melanie Niepsui, all of Chicago; Sophomores Anisa Bravo, Gio Palomino Jaime Santana, and Gaby Sifuentes, all of Chicago, and Danielle DiBari of Elmwood Park; plus Freshmen Hannah Fath of Norridge, Anthony Marra of Chicago and Mary Jo Toohey of River Forest.

Guerin Prep Participates in Mock Trial—add one

The mock trial experience includes presenting both sides of the legal question. The students play the roles of the plaintiff, defendant, witnesses (fact and expert) and attorneys representing each side. The attorneys are expected to try the case according to the rules of evidence, including presenting opening statements, examining and cross-examining witnesses, making appropriate objections, presenting closing statements on behalf of the team's fictitious client.

Volunteer judges and attorneys evaluate students on their arguments and students must also take a written test about the issues of the case.

The students have been practicing with Mr. Jaime Santana, the father of a sophomore Nolan Scholar and private attorney and Mrs. Sharon McFadden, an alumna of Mother Theodore Guerin High School and current chairperson of the Guerin Board of Directors, also a private attorney.

The students have also been supported by Mrs. Karin Calandriello, the director of the Nolan Scholar Program, and Mr. Tom Jaworski, academic counselor for the program.

"I am extremely proud of our students—both as individuals and as a team, explained Calandriello. Their knowledge of the material, poise under pressure and critical thinking skills have been outstanding throughout this whole experience."

Calandriello explained that the mock trial is really not about becoming a lawyer. "It is about students developing those life skills that will enable them to become the leaders of the future."

She noted that the Guerin Prep team was pitted against schools with lots more experience. "The Guerin Team not only 'held their own,' but also excelled throughout the course of the trial. Their determination, preparedness and adaptability were strengths that forced the more 'experienced' teams to re-strategize their positions."

In addition to the state competition, the Guerin Prep mock trial team also participated in the Northwest Suburban Bar Associations' 15th annual mock trial invitational in February. They finished eighth out of 27 teams in that event, earning a total of 208 points. The top school earned 243 points.

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