



▲ **Competing students meet the participating judges.**
 ◀ **Bishop Gorman seniors prepare for the 2009 regional We the People competition.**

Law-Related Education – WORKING FOR OUR FUTURE

BY KIMBERLY MAXSON-RUSHTON, ESQ.

In December, right in the middle of the holiday season, when the thought of a long winter's nap is a mere dream, an eclectic group of community leaders – judges, legal practitioners, legislators, journalist and educators – all come together to judge the We the People competition. It is a competition in which high school students study the U.S. Constitution, with an emphasis on the Bill of Rights and its application to modern-day issues facing our country. Most of the competition's judges have been participating in this event for years, despite the preparation time involved and the fact that it takes place on a Saturday in mid-December.

One judge who is always present, both for the Law-Related Education Committee (LRE) and the We the People competition, is Judge Phil Pro, who serves as the co-coordinator of the event in conjunction with the State Bar of Nevada. Like the parents of the participating students, the teachers who spend countless hours preparing the student teams and the judges who generously give of their time, Pro participates because of the overwhelming sense of pride attendant in seeing Nevada's youth becoming both knowledgeable of and excited about the U.S. Constitution.

Any interested high school team can participate in the district competition. The teams are diverse, consisting of students who are home-schooled and from charter,

public and private schools. It is an incredible experience witnessing the diversity of the students competing at the district competition and their varying levels of preparedness, realizing that the stakes at the state and national level are very high and fiercely competitive. It's amazing to realize that the students at this level have knowledge of the Constitution and its application to current events that is comparable to that of a first-year law student. Equal to the outstanding teams competing at this level are the judges, many of whom are members of the Nevada Supreme Court as well as congressional delegates. In addition to serving as judges at the state competition, our esteemed justices mentor Nevada's state team and, just like the judges at the district competition, they take an incredible amount of pride in helping Nevada's young people prepare for their futures.

My involvement with the LRE Committee began years ago, when former Attorney General Frankie Sue Del Papa asked me to represent the Attorney General's Office. I've always appreciated that request because of the opportunity it gave me to participate in We the People and to learn more about the state bar's LRE Committee and the multiple programs it sponsors, such as the Mock Trial Program, Project Citizen, Dialogue on Freedom and Law Day. The objective of the LRE Committee, in conjunction with the state bar, is to raise awareness in children grades K-12 about the law, the legal system and their rights and responsibilities as citizens. The role of the state bar is to provide financial support as well as to recruit attorneys to serve as judges for various competitions and to mentor students interested in the profession of law. In fulfilling this role, members of the State Bar of Nevada promote cooperative learning, problem solving and positive interactions between our youth and the legal community.

The importance of giving children a civic education cannot be underestimated. The Youth Act is an empowering program, designed to help develop leadership skills in today's young people and to help them learn how to advocate for meaningful changes in their communities. In years past, I've had the opportunity to work with elementary school students as they identify a problem within their school and formulate an action plan to effectuate change. It was an amazing experience working with fifth graders, helping them develop life skills which will enable them to be future leaders.

As critical as the role LRE plays in helping students develop is, the success of the program is measured mainly by the commitment of the volunteers who give of their time and expertise in order to ensure the future of our youth. As members of the state bar, we should all aspire to perform pro bono service annually – the Rules of Professional Conduct remind us of this obligation. Without diminishing the importance of providing legal service to those unable to pay, organizations like the LRE provide alternative avenues for practitioners to give back to their communities. When I worked for the State of Nevada, many

of my colleagues in government service engaged in charitable and/or volunteer work by serving on the boards of nonprofit organizations, as well as assisting nonprofits with legal matters, thereby fulfilling their obligation to give back to our community.

In conclusion, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the numerous volunteers whose time and contributions make the LRE programs successful, and to encourage others to follow suit by engaging in any of the numerous programs organized by the LRE, or by joining the LRE Committee itself. I'd also like to thank the numerous members of Nevada's judiciary, who regularly contribute their expertise, their time and often their resources to the LRE Committee and its programs. As members of the State Bar of Nevada, we're fortunate to have colleagues who truly lead by example! ■

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