

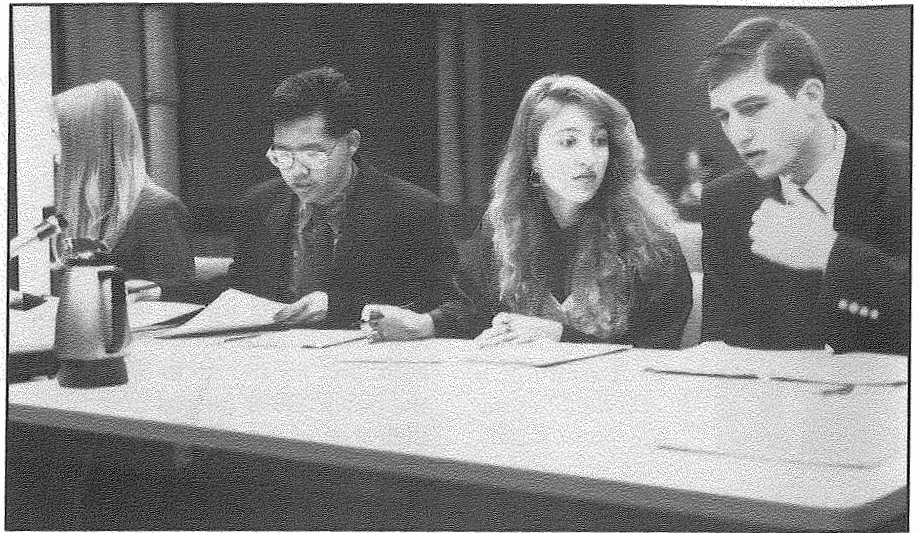
# CONTRA COSTA COUNTY MOCK TRIAL PROGRAM

by Michael J. Markowitz

The high school students of Contra Costa County have, each year, an excellent opportunity to achieve hands-on experience, as well as a wealth of knowledge and understanding, regarding our legal justice system. This experience enables them to see what only a small portion of our community ever sees, how a case is prepared, presented, and decided.

Through the Contra Costa County Mock Trial Competition students from a number of local high schools will be working on a hypothetical criminal case. Each year the case usually involves a topical constitutional law issue such as free speech or privacy rights. The students this year, from 12 local high schools, are afforded an opportunity to enhance their analytical writing and debate skills. At the same time they are introduced to legal research, writing, oral advocacy, and ethics.

The Contra Costa County Mock Trial Competition is part of a state-



▲ Harvey R. Wall Photography

wide program which is sponsored and administrated by the Constitutional Rights Foundation. Other sponsors, on the statewide level, are the State Department of Education, the State Bar of California, the California Young Lawyers Association, and the Los Angeles and San Francisco Daily Journals.

Unfortunately, funding, even by these groups, is extremely limited. With more cuts in local and state education budgets it is necessary to raise funds within the community. Fortunately for our local participants, Academic Programs for Excellence (APEX) has stepped forward to help fill the void created by those budget cuts. The over 200 students involved are assisted by teacher coordinators, volunteer attorneys, and members of our local municipal and superior court benches in putting on this yearly competition. Last year 17 judges and 38 attorneys gave of their time and experience to help run a successful competition. Our local champions, the team from California High School in San Ramon, coached by **Richard Raines**, a partner in the law firm of Gagen, McCoy, McMahon & Armstrong in Danville, went to the state finals in Sacramento and finished fourth.

APEX not only sponsors and administers the local mock trial competition but other programs such as Model U.N. and the Academic Decathlon. These other programs are funded, in large part, by local business, educa-

tion, and service groups. **Marc Hallert**, president of the Contra Costa County Bar Association, and other members of the local bar, feel that our local legal community has an obligation to the young people of our county to assure the continuation of the mock trial program and urges all of his constituents to contribute to this valuable source of community pride.

Your county bar, the Barristers Association, and a number of local law firms and individual attorneys have taken it upon themselves to help by not only contributing time but also money to help fund the program. Marc and I both call upon you to step into the gap created by the budget cuts and help fund this worthwhile program, showing the community that we as lawyers are interested and capable of putting our money where our mouths are.

Those interested in contribution can contact the APEX office at 510-942-3378. Hopefully with your contributions we can report to you next year that, like Santa Clara County, the Contra Costa County Bar Association has underwritten this excellent and extremely valuable program. ★

*Mike Markowitz is a certified criminal law specialist practicing at the firm of Gagen, McCoy, McMahon & Armstrong in Danville.*

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