

# Tri-County High & Judge Dutcher holding mock trials since 1995

by **Brianne Kotolski**

In 1995, then Waushara County District Attorney Guy Dutcher along with the late Tri-County High School social studies teacher Marge Czlapinski implemented mock trials for juniors and seniors enrolled in practical law. On Monday, Jan. 18, Dutcher, the current Waushara County Circuit Court Judge, will celebrate his 22nd year volunteering at the mock trials.

When the idea first started, Czlapinski and Judge Dutcher wanted to teach law in a hands-on way by providing the students with the experience rather than just text from a book. "The mock trials provide the students with exposure to the judicial system first hand. It really brings to life what most students only read about," said Judge Dutcher.

Up until about 2010, the students in



Tri-County High School Mock Trial jury members, Zac Truehl, Elizabeth Kemnetz, Lyle Reid, Morgan Zywicki, Stone Stommel, Cody Lockhart, Cody Nigh, Juan Landeros, and Jeffrey Baughman, listen to the prosecuting and defense attorneys present their case during a mock trial held at Tri-County High School.



Breonna Peckham, Claudia Gonzalez, and Siandra Mata-Rodriguez listen as evidence is presented during the Tri-County High School practical law Mock Trial, State vs. Mary Defendant.

Czlapinski's class as well as current social studies teacher Peter Dassow's practical law class would travel to the Waushara County Courthouse in Wautoma to participate in the courtroom. Now, the trials are held in the high school auditorium. "It's easier for me to travel there, than them to pack up and come here," said Judge Dutcher.

"My favorite part was the field trip to the courthouse when all of the work we put in beforehand finally paid off," said Brittany Wecker, a prosecution attorney for the 2009 mock trial.

Kasey Rader, the 2014 prosecution attorney, said she most enjoyed all of the work prior to the case and writing opening and closing

statements, the arguments, and questioning. "We got to work with the rest of the class and after all the hard work the case was very rewarding," said Rader.

Since its inception, Judge Dutcher has volunteered as the mock trial judge and helps to create a realistic courtroom experience. "The students really enjoy the trial. It's always really interesting to see how the trial develops each year," said Dassow.

The case the students take part in is the same each year, State vs. Mary Defendant, which is a murder trial where Mary Defendant is accused of murdering her live-in boyfriend while he slept in his bed.

"The mock trials make students think analytically and problem solve, skills that today's students really need for the future," said Dassow. "The case contains many problems for both the prosecution and the defense so it makes both sides really work to develop a strategy for the case. This fosters critical thinking as they come up with solutions to the many problems they encounter with the case."

The students are each assigned a part and prepare with their teams for several weeks before the trials. "The mock trial is one of everyone's favorite part of the class," said Emily Thompson, 2012 jury member. "Having a hands-on project like that is fun and let's everyone in the class put all of the things they learned throughout the semester into action."

This year, with only 10 students in a class that

usually harbors about 20, it has been a challenge for the group as there aren't enough students to fill all of the roles, including the jury. So, as he has done on occasion in previous years, Dassow will likely have other social studies students to participate.

Many former practical law students agreed that Judge Dutcher and Dassow have made an impression on them as well as helped them



Waushara County Circuit Court Judge Guy Dutcher reads his ruling while participating the 2015 mock trial at Tri-County High School. On Monday, Jan. 18, Judge Dutcher will be volunteering for his 22nd year of mock trials at TCHS.

learn more than they had ever imagined in one semester.

"I enjoyed learning about the laws and rules that affect people not only in Wisconsin but across the nation," said Brandon Clapper, 2011 lead defense attorney. "Putting my knowledge to use in the court cases was my favorite part as well as the part that has stuck with me the longest."

Several students who are currently attending TCHS and former alumni who have participated in the mock trials have gone on to college and to receive law related degrees or plan to when they graduate.

According to Lucas Marinack a senior and the 2015 prosecution attorney, his favorite part of the mock trials was "having the opportunity to work with a sitting Judge, Judge Dutcher. The course became one of the main reasons why I hope to attend law school in the future."

Kasey Zdroid, a 2015 mock trial lawyer, also believes the practical law class helped him find his passion. "Being able to explore an actual interest of mine (law), it shaped what I want to become in the future," he said.

Each year Judge Dutcher looks forward to the TCHS mock trials held every Martin Luther King Jr. Day. "Personally, being able to interact with the students in a positive manner and contributing to their education in a modest way, it's really rewarding," said Judge Dutcher.



Former practical law students and mock trial participants Dane Sherman, Kasey Zdroid, Chelsea King, and Natalie Henriksen prepare for opening statements during the 2015 Mock Trial at Tri-County High School.