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02.08.22

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McAllen ISD's Lamar Academy Takes Top Honors in Annual Mock Trial Competition

Two Regional Mock Trial Teams Headed to State Competition

Twelve regional high school Mock Trial teams participated in the Annual Mock Trial Competition on January 29, 2022, at the Hidalgo County Courthouse, vying for the opportunity to move on to the state level competition.

In the fictional civil jury trial of Musée d'Orso v. Seascape Property and Casualty Insurance Company, the Mock Trial Team of Lamar Academy (McAllen ISD) out-motivated and out-argued their case to become the regional mock trial champions. Sharyland Pioneer High School (Sharyland ISD) earned runner-up honors. Both teams will advance to the state competition to be held on March 4, 2022, in Dallas, Texas.

Members of the Lamar Academy Mock Trial Team are Ana Sofia Leal, Victoria Otero-Lai, Florencia Gastelum, Vianey Silva, Sofia Cadena, Olivia Gonzalez, Catalina Arriaga, Nathan Kaplan, Sohumi Jain, Lillian Welty, Gerardo Zermeno, and Adrian Villegas, courtroom artist. The team's faculty advisor is Hiram Orozco and Sandra Herrera-Walker, and the team's attorney/advisor is Jaime A. Gonzalez, Jr.

Members of the Sharyland Pioneer High School Mock Trial Team are Fernando Morales, Alberto Fuentes, Graham Lagrange, Karina Mendoza, Vanessa Garza, Victoria Garza, Danna Aguilar, Joslyn Lopez, Ixchel Bravo-Aguilar, Sharis Kairuz, and Jada Cantu-Cabrera, courtroom artist. The team's faculty advisor is Gilberto Luna and the team's attorney/advisor is Christina Saldivar.

In the mock trial competition's "Courtroom Sketch Artist" category, student artists are required to document the court proceedings by depicting an actual courtroom scene observed during their team's trial. The top two finishers were Adrian Villegas, Lamar Academy (McAllen ISD) and Angela Montalvo, Sharyland High School (Sharyland ISD). Both artists will move on to the state competition. As described by Texas Mock Trial Competition contest materials, the Courtroom Artist Contest aims to teach student artists about the courtroom artist profession, teach student artists about the courtroom and legal process, and help the student artist to improve their artistic talents.

Judges also selected individual honors including “Best Advocate” recognition to Olivia Gonzalez, *Lamar Academy High School, McAllen ISD* and Mark Chesson, *McAllen High School, McAllen ISD*; and “Best Witness” commendations to Lilian Welty, *Lamar Academy, McAllen ISD*; Karen Rodriguez, *Edinburg High School, Edinburg CISD*; and Miguel Salcido, *Rivera Early College High School, Brownsville ISD*.

In addition to bragging rights, teams will receive scholarship checks donated by the Hidalgo County Bar Association. The Lamar Academy Mock Trial Team will receive a \$500 scholarship check and the Sharyland Pioneer team will be awarded a \$250 scholarship. The third-place team, Edinburg High School, will receive a \$125 scholarship check. Top finishers in the Courtroom Artist category earned a \$75 scholarship for first place and \$50 for second place.

“Students and coaches work extensive hours studying and preparing for this competition,” says Jose J. Saenz, Region One ESC Mock Trial Coordinator. “This year was particularly challenging, but the dedicated mock trial team members, their sponsors, and attorney advisors persevered!”

Special thanks are extended to Hidalgo County attorneys, who donated their time to serve as “judges” throughout the varying levels of competition and to Judge Fernando Mancias, 93rd District Court. Recognition is also given to Sergeant Juan Vasquez (Hidalgo County Sheriff’s Office), Florinda Flores, Juana Montoya (Hidalgo County Courthouse Custodial Service), the Hidalgo County Bar Association, Hidalgo County Executive Offices, Texas Young Lawyer’s Association, and the Region One Education Service Center.

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