



EVENTS AT ACADEME

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Alleged Murderer Found Not-Guilty of Murder and Narcotic Distribution

...by Academe Students in Mock Trial!

DECATUR, Ga., May 17, 2012 // Students at Academe of the Oaks, an independent high school grounded in Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf curriculum and philosophy, found defendant Mickey Finn not-guilty of felony murder and distribution of a narcotic following a dramatic mock trial held on campus last week.

During the emotional two-hour hearing, the entire student body got a first-hand look at the criminal justice system as Marcus Patton's tenth-grade civics class presented the facts of the case before a "courtroom" of Academe students and a jury of their ninth-grade peers. The criminal case was unusually challenging in that, since there was no obvious verdict and only circumstantial evidence, findings would be largely dependent upon the skill of the orators.

Defendant Mickey Finn, a college student at fictional Metropolitan University, was charged with felony murder of student Collingsworth Morse and with unlawful distribution of the narcotic ecstasy. Five-attorney teams represented both the state and the defendant, and each team called four witnesses to the stand to lay-out their respective versions of the case. Retired judge Hon. John S. Langford, (superior court) presided over the proceedings.

Mr. Patton, a trained lawyer, has coached regional champion mock-trial teams in competitions sanctioned by the State Bar of Georgia, which provides materials outlining the facts of cases involved. He is a member of the Georgia Mock Trial Competition State Finals Planning Board and a contributing editor of the Teacher's Manual for An Introduction to Law in Georgia (3rd edition). Participation in, and analysis of, mock trials provides young people with an insider's perspective of actual courtroom procedures and the law. In addition, student participants develop useful questioning, critical thinking, and oral advocacy skills.

The alleged crime took place at a home shared by college students, during an annual Halloween party. During her opening arguments, prosecutor Sarah Cutts argued that when Finn, dressed as the Grim Reaper, served drinks at midnight he spiked the victim's glass with what turned out to be a fatal dose of ecstasy. As a result, Morse "died with a cup in his hand," said Cutts.

Defense attorney Shaine Garcia then challenged the prosecutors to meet the full burden of proof, and noted that there was no direct evidence tying the defendant to the crime. His witnesses would, he said, contradict the theory that Finn was enacting retribution his belief that Morse vandalized the defendant's car, and offer an alternate theory that pinned the crime on another student altogether.

Following the closing arguments, Judge Langford asked the jury to review the facts of the case openly in front of the student courtroom observers. Together, they reviewed issues of motive and probability as they related to circumstantial versus direct evidence—ultimately poking holes in the prosecution's strategy. After deliberation, the jury voted not-guilty due to lack of evidence.

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-Student juror

(more)

“I still have the feeling that he is guilty, but there just wasn’t enough evidence to prove it,” said juror Isabel following the verdict. Another Juror, Nikolai, noted that the witnesses only confirmed that the murder could have happened a number of different ways. “There were too many conflicting statements,” he added.

Founded in 2003, Academe of the Oaks offers a high school education without parallel in the Atlanta area. The rich, experiential Waldorf curriculum stimulates developing minds, and its close community of teachers is deeply committed to each student’s total growth. Academe of the Oaks offers a challenging academic program, laying a strong foundation for postsecondary work, while fostering students’ confidence to think independently and engaging their enthusiasm for learning. The SAIS-accredited high school, located just east of downtown Decatur, offers ninth through twelfth grades. For more information about the school, please contact Eva Handschin, School Director, at (404) 405-2173, or visit www.academeatlanta.org.

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