

Palo Christi students learn about the law



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TERRY ORGAN/Miner

Bailiff Russ Grogan and his "shadow" Rebecca Williams lead defendant Jimmy Childs into the gymnasium at Palo Christi Elementary School on Thursday for the start of a mock trial.

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Jury's verdict in mock trial opposite of verdict at Cerbat

KINGMAN - Roughly 150 students in grades 3-5 at Palo Christi Elementary School got to see how the legal system works Thursday, which was Law Day.

"I think they need to experience law enforcement," Principal Steve Hite said before the proceeding began. "It's something that may interest them career-wise."

"I probably was 30 before I saw a trial in real life, so they're getting a heads up."

In a news release, Mohave County Superior Court Law Librarian Lori Linn stated Law Day on May 1 "was designated by President Dwight Eisenhower in 1958 as a day of national dedication to the principle of government under law."

"This year's Law Day theme is The Rule of Law: Foundation for Communities of Opportunity and Equality, which refers to a system of self-government with a strong and accessible legal process."

Members of the Palo Christi Student Council "shadowed" court personnel during a mock trial in the school's gymnasium.

Judge Lee Jantzen, who handles both criminal and juvenile cases, presided over "The Case of the Stolen Crayons," in which Jimmy Childs portrayed the defendant accused of theft.

Mohave County Deputy Attorney Derek Carlisle acted as prosecutor, Eric Beiningen of the Legal Defender's Office served as counsel for Jimmy, and Assistant Jury Commissioner Doreen Ruggles advised on jury issues.

Also present were: Sowande Brown-Lawson, courtroom clerk; Linda Cantrell, court reporter; Det. Gabe Otero of the Kingman Police Department as the crime investigator; and Russ Grogan from the Mohave County Sheriff's Office acting as bailiff.

Shadows included Kiersten Kinsey (Jantzen), Mariah Serl (Carlisle), Alexis McDade (Brown-Lawson), Jennifer Grammer-Ruggles (Beiningen), Katie Ruggles (Ruggles), Jamie Lynn Gonzales (Cantrell), Rheannon Darrington (Otero), and Rebecca Williams (Grogan). Candrah Martin was a defense witness.

Jurors included Julia Moll, Baily Hammond, Kye Hill, Kama Salazar, Natasha Garrison, Alex Schneider, Max Serl, Jordan Schlund and Brody McCloud.

"This is law day and it gives us a chance to explain our real-life jobs," Doreen Ruggles began. "We're going to hold a trial and bring the court to you, instead of you going to court."

Jantzen made some opening remarks in which he defined theft as knowingly possessing the property of another with the intent to permanently deprive the person of the property.

In his opening statement, Carlisle said the crime happened April 1, 2008. Dawn Uhles' first-grade class went to recess and the box of crayons was where it was supposed to be in the room. Jimmy was the last one to leave the room and the crayons were gone upon return of the class. Det. Otero responded and the crayons were subsequently found in Jimmy's desk. Everyone liked Jimmy and nobody had a reason to place the crayons in his desk.

"You're going to hear from a witness that Jimmy was out on the playground and Jimmy will tell you he was out on the playground," Beiningen said in his opening statement. "I want you to listen to all the testimony and don't form any opinions."

Uhles, Rheannon Darrington and Otero gave testimony for the prosecution. Candrah Martin and Jimmy then testified for the defense.

Carlisle and Beiningen then made closing arguments before the jury retired to consider a verdict. After about five minutes, they returned with a verdict of guilty.

"That's a different result from this morning," Jantzen said. "It all depends on who the jurors are."

He referred to a similar mock trial held Thursday morning at Cerbat Elementary School. The same case was heard with a not guilty verdict returned by that jury.

"This was real fun," Kiersten Kinsey said. "He's the best judge I've been around and it was an honor for me."

"I think if we did this more often, someday kids would learn to be judges and lawyers."