Superior Court of California
County of Orange
News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Court Named Constitutional Rights Foundation's Community Partner of the Year

The Constitutional Rights Foundation, Orange County (CRF – OC) recently honored Orange County Superior Court for its long-term commitment and contribution to the annual Orange County Mock Trial competition with the **Award of Community Partner of the Year**.



Orange County Superior Court Presiding Judge Kirk Nakamura addresses the event.

Orange County Superior Court Presiding **Judge Kirk Nakamura** was presented with this recognition during the 39th Annual Awards Reception on February 6, at the University of California Irvine's student center.

During the ceremony Judge Nakamura was also given the opportunity to present the CRF – OC Award for Civility to Foothill High School. "We have our court system to resolve disputes, we don't do it in the streets," Judge Nakamura said. **"That is why I am so pleased that the Constitutional Rights Foundation of Orange County has decided to give this new award to High Schools teams which show civility."**

The Superior Court also received recognition through the work of **Hon. Michael Strickroth**, who was recognized as Judge of the Year and Superior Court **Senior Research Attorney Aaron Heisler**, who was recognized as the top Attorney Coach of the Year for his work with the Pacific Coast High School Mock Trial Team.

"I was flattered to be given the award that could have gone to any of the numerous participating judicial officers," Judge Strickroth said. "I accepted it with all the other volunteers in mind, as an honor to our Orange County bench and the legal community it serves."

Judge Thomas Delaney and Judge Craig Arthur were also at hand during the ceremony and presented Mock Trial Volunteer and Student Awards.

"The competition provides students with hands-on experience on trying cases and, therefore, teaches them about the intricacies of our system of justice," said **Judge Delaney**, adding "the basic trial skills

they learn, public speaking, how to present a persuasive argument, professionalism, among many others, are all useful in careers other than the law as well."

Every aspect of the competition is run by students, with the help of adults.

"The students play each and every part, including attorneys, defendants, witnesses, courtroom bailiffs, and courtroom clerks," said **Judge Arthur**, adding "the experience for each student is always one that is remembered for a lifetime and certainly looks great on a college application or job resume. The Orange County Superior Court is proud of the individual accomplishments of these students. Our participation in the CRF-OC Mock Trial competition is something many of us eagerly look forward to each year."

"Training students for the competition is grueling but fun work," said Heisler.

"By the end, and regardless of their roles in the competition, many of the students learn to craft and present a credible criminal case or defense. More significantly, the students sharpen their critical thinking and listening skills while learning a new perspective on the nature of criminal and Constitutional law and our justice system," Heisler added.

Last November, this massive civics education event held at the Orange County Superior Court in Santa Ana, hosted 45 separate teams representing 41 high schools – as 4 schools have more than 1 team – with a total of 929 students, 63 teacher coaches, 86 volunteer attorney coaches, 219 attorneys volunteered to score one or more rounds of the competition, and 46 volunteer judges, 43 of whom were sitting or retired Orange County Superior Court judges.

"CRF Mock Trial is a great opportunity for judicial officers to spend time with high school students, so they can get some exposure to how our judicial system of government works. Not enough time is spent on civics in our schools," Judge **Strickroth** said. "This program gives us a chance to reach out to our high school youth and familiarize them, to some degree, with the court system—and have some fun at the same time."

The numerous programs that CRF-OC offers work together to improve civic awareness, learning, and engagement in California and help to foster local teens' understanding and appreciation of our democratic and judicial institutions and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, as well as develop academic and leadership skills, instill an interest in contributing to the larger community, and aspire to professional careers.

The importance of civic learning and engagement cannot be overstated. Knowledge of the system and participation have the power to revitalize the democratic process and promote access to justice in California.

The Constitutional Rights Foundation, Orange County is a local non-profit, non-partisan education organization dedicated to promoting civic literacy, youth leadership, and career awareness among Orange County teens.

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