

Over 250 students attend Law Day events at Pima County Superior Court

By Dave Ricker
Superior Court

Liberty Under Law: Empowering Youth, Assuring Democracy. That was the theme of Law Day 2007 at Pima County Superior Court. Law Day is a national day during which the rule of law is celebrated.

A year ago, approximately 100 local high school students attended the 2006 Law Day celebration at the court. This year, the attendance by local students grew by an estimated 150 percent as students from area public and charter schools spent most of the day at the courthouse on Monday, April 30.

Among the schools and programs in attendance this year where: Sahuarita Middle School, Rincon High School, the TUSD Teenage Parent Program, Ironwood Ridge High School, Mountain View High School, Cholla High School, Project MORE, the Academy of Math and Science and the Phi Alpha Delta International Pre-Law Fraternity.

This year's event began in the Pima County Board of Superiors' Hearing Room. Presiding Judge Jan Kearney welcomed the attendees and stressed the importance of the celebration and the need for young people to be involved in their communities.



Presiding Judge Jan Kearney welcomed the students attending Law Day 2007

Panel discussion

Local attorney Elliot Glicksman immediately got the attention of the students and teachers with a discussion of the serious consequences that can result from drinking and driving. Mr. Glicksman pointed out that while the legal blood alcohol limit for adults is .08 percent the legal limit for drivers under the age of 18 years old is .01 percent.

Pima County Juvenile Court Comm. Stephen Rubin, one of three panel members, continued that theme by tell-

ing the students that many young people lose their privileges to drive because of other legal difficulties like possession of marijuana or theft.

Comm. Rubin observed that he and his colleagues are seeing fewer serious offenses being committed by young people. "The most serious consequence that can be imposed upon a juvenile for any offense is commitment to the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections until they reach 18," he said. "We used to send a lot of kids to the Department of Corrections. That has been reduced over the last five years."

Comm. Rubin suggested that recently instituted programs have made a big difference at juvenile court. "Juvenile court is, even though you might not think it, a nurturing place for children in trouble," he said.

Another member of the panel, Monique Lyon, has represented both juveniles and adults as a member of the Pima County Public Defender's Office. "The law affects all of us. It touches all of us. The reason we have laws that restrict things we think are fun to do is because we all have to live together," she said. "The more people who live in a community together the more laws we are going to have so that we can all have rights without stepping on each other."

During her six years at juvenile court, Ms. Lyon learned that winning and losing was not the important thing, but that helping her juvenile clients improve their lives was the most important thing. "As a public defender we find that justice is the thing that prevails not that the better attorney always gets their client off," she said.

There is one major difference between adult court and juvenile court. "Juveniles don't get juries because a jury of their peers would be other juveniles. I thought that was largely unfair and several of my clients thought that was unfair. Juvenile court works a little bit differently as it gives youth an opportunity to have less imposing consequences when they are found to be responsible for their criminal behavior," Ms. Lyon said. "When I represented juveniles at juvenile court there was always light at the end of the tunnel because when you turn 18 even if you were at the department of corrections the day



Court Reporter Diane Sonntag explains to students how she records the official transcripts of court proceedings as Judge Michael Miller looks on.

you turned 18 they had to let you go. There are mandatory crimes that if you are accused of committing them it doesn't matter if you are 14, it doesn't matter if you are 16, it doesn't matter if you are 17-and-a-half, you will automatically be transferred downtown. Those folks are transferred to the county jail. There is a juvenile section in the county jail, but it's still jail. It is not a pleasant place. You lose so much of who you are and you lose your rights when you end up in jail."

The final member of the panel was Adelita Grijalva, project manager for Pima County Teen Court. Ms. Grijalva is also a member of the Governing Board for Tucson Unified School District. "Your generation and all of you sitting here are our future. You're going to be the public defenders, the judges and the school board members of the future," she said. "The decisions that you make now are so important."

Ms. Grijalva spoke from experience when she urged the students in attendance to get involved. Her father, Raul



Moderator Elliot Glicksman made several points to the students during the Law Day program.

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Grijalva, is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives and previously was elected to seats on the Pima County Board of Supervisors and the TUSD governing board. “When you have opportunities to get involved it is so important that you do it. We need all of you not only to keep our community going and flourishing, but to make it better,” she said.

Pima County Teen court is designed as a diversion program for young people. “Before you get to see a judge and before

you have a public defender you are given the option of going to a program like teen court,” Ms. Grijalva explained. “We need young people between the ages of 12 and 17 to sit on the juries. They decide the sentences for teens who have been arrested on charges of possession of marijuana or alcohol or curfew violations.”

Essay contest

There were three winners, all from Sunnyside High School, of the annual



Law Day panelists (left to right) were Monique Lyon, Comm. Stephen Rubin and Adelita Grijalva.



Judge Paul Tang (right) presents the first place award in the Law day Essay Contest to Janet Molinares of Sunnyside High School.

essay contest sponsored by the Pima County Bar Association. Judge Tang said. “These are three Sunnyside students,” said Judge Paul Tang, an alumnus of Sunnyside High School. “What these three students did is write about democracy and how it impacts them with respect to their student communities.”

The first place winner, Janet Molinares, won a \$100 gift certificate to the Tucson Mall for her efforts. “She wrote about her role in democracy,” Judge Tang said.

The second place winner, An-

drea Rueda, won a \$75 gift certificate. “Andrea’s topic was simply democracy,” Judge Tang said.

And, the third place winner, Mayra Martinez, won a \$50 gift certificate. “She wrote about the role of young people in assuring democracy,” Judge Tang added. All three winners of the essay contest are 16-year-old sophomores at Sunnyside.

Following the panel discussion and the awards ceremony, the students moved to the courthouse to meet with judges and to observe judicial proceedings. All participants enjoyed refreshments in the Jury Assembly room before they returned to school.