



BETHLEHEM YOUTH COURT, INC.

1st Quarter 2006

Youth Court Journal

A Quarterly Publication of all news related to Bethlehem Youth Court

New Member Training In Progress

On March 1st, 2006 a group of 37 high school aged students solemnly stood, raised their right hand, and under the guidance of Town Justice Milano took the Oath of Confidentiality required of all new Bethlehem Youth Court members. These 37 students have agreed to take on the challenge and responsibility of learning how to prepare and present Youth Court cases to a jury of their peers.

Each of these 37 "members in training" have voluntarily signed up to attend more than twenty hours of classes, complete weekly homework assignments, present impromptu speeches, work closely with people they have never met before, and be prepared to work on an actual Youth Court case immediately following graduation. Why would a busy teenager even consider becoming involved in an activity that demands so much from them? The reasons are varied, but they all seem to center around a common theme: dedication to the community and to their peers.



Judge Homer present a session to the new members



Nate H. poses a question

These young people realize that through their participation in Youth Court they will be in a unique position, a position that many of their friends could not even imagine. As a Youth Court member these young people will have the ability to influence the lives of their classmates; to help ease the mind of an individual who has been harmed; to alleviate a parent of some worry; and to perhaps, positively change the course of someone's life forever.

To acquire the skills needed to be this agent of change, the students are being instructed in the various aspects of the criminal justice system and how the juvenile justice system

operates within these confines; how the Youth Court system functions locally and nationally; how to prepare and present a case as a Youth Court lawyer, judge, jury foreperson, clerk, and victim advocate; and the impact of criminal behavior on the community.



Pat V. and Jillian R. look over some notes

The instructors of these lessons are also volunteers and participate in training because they understand the significance of properly preparing these students for involvement in such an important undertaking. Instructors for this year's training include Federal Magistrate David R. Homer, Albany County District Attorney David Soares, Bethlehem Town Justices Frank Milano and Paul Dwyer, Federal Public Defender Gene Primomo, Federal Prosecutors Thomas Spina and Barbara Cottrell, Detective Patrice Lockart from the Colonie Police Department, Dr. Maureen McLeod from The Sage Colleges, and Albany County Probation Officer Frank Cangiano.

"I am confident that the students will be ready and able to do their best work when they are faced with preparing and presenting an actual Youth Court case. All of the students are working hard and understand the concepts and philosophy of Youth Court. I am looking forward to working with them as full-fledged Bethlehem Youth Court members," stated BYC Director Stacey Whiteley.



New members review a case study

New Member Graduation is April 11th at 7PM in the Bethlehem Town Hall Auditorium. The public is invited to attend.



Message from the Director

Another new member training session is coming to an end and I am really excited to get to work with this new groups of young people. Thirty seven students in grades 9 through 11 are in the midst of learning the basic theory and practices of the juvenile justice system. Lawyers, local and federal judges, D.A. Soares, local law enforcement, college professors, victims' families, and current student members have all taken roles in ensuring this new group of youth court members are prepared to take on the task of Youth Court membership.

Although I am looking forward to working with this new group of members, I will truly miss the 29 Youth Court members that are graduating from high school this June. This group I feel especially close to as my first day of work, in fall 2002, was many of these students' last day of new member training. My first "official" job duty was attending their graduation.

Tom, Casey, Dan, Jordan, David and Dan O., started their Youth Court career at the same time I did. Together we learned the ins and outs of the Youth Court system and grew as people and as participants in our community. It has been a great opportunity to watch these young people grow and mature. Starting out as naïve and nervous freshman, and now graduating as confident, self-assured seniors; these students have been a pleasure to get to know and work with.

The rest of the graduating members, Adam, Cameron, Eric, Emily C., Leigh, Ann, Emily D., Denise, Erin, Ryne, Seth, Mike, Bobby, Chelsea, Rose, Tricia, Sydney, Ian, Katie S., Brian, Melissa, Katie W., and Kenny, started their BYC careers a little later than the previous group, but they too deserve honor and recognition for their growth as individuals and for their contributions to the community.

Although the Youth Court experience can't be credited for all of the members' admirable development, I

do believe it did help create these responsible young adults that soon will be unleashed into the "real" world.

As always, older generations continue to gripe about the sorry state of today's youth. I would respectfully disagree with those that forward this position. The young people that I have been so lucky to work with in the past four years are kind, caring, compassionate, and committed to improving the world in which they live.

Thank you to each of you (and your families) and I wish you all the best!

Stacey

P.S. Pierce, I didn't forget about you. As our solo returning member, thank you for your continued dedication to the program. You are the "go-to" guy and I know you are up for it.

Join us for the return of... *The End-Of-The-Year Picnic*
 JUNE 9th: 4PM to DUSK: Henry Hudson Park. More Details to Follow!

Youth Court **By K. S.**

I became involved with Youth Court through my arrest for petit larceny. When I first imagined what Youth Court was like, I was terrified. I pictured a solemn courtroom filled with people watching and a jury off to the side with an armed bailiff and everything. I was relieved when I saw that Youth Court was much different. It was much more softened compared to criminal trials I'd seen on TV, and yet it was still efficient and delivered an appropriate verdict for my case. The court consisted of a jury, bailiff, prosecution and defense attorneys, and a judge; who were all about the same age as me. The commonality alone made me feel more comfortable in such an uncomfortable situation, and I really ap-

preciate that a court like that exists in my community. Besides handling crimes by minors, Youth Court simultaneously offers a great opportunity to teenagers who want to experience participating in a court of law. Youth Court is ideal for students aspiring to someday work in such an environment, especially as an attorney. In addition, colleges encourage out-of-school activities like Youth Court.

I appreciate that a system like Youth Court is available to offer so many opportunities to teenagers.

This article was written by a former offender who successfully completed the Youth Court program in 2005. It was reprinted with the offender's and their parents' permission.



Wenger Scholarship Award Essay

By Casey Sheridan

Each year, BYC awards a \$500 cash award to a graduating Youth Court member in honor of Honorable Peter C. Wenger, a town justice and founding father of BYC. Those seniors that wish to be considered for this award must submit an essay reflecting their experiences with BYC. The essays are anonymously judged for content and form by a panel of BYC Board Members. I am pleased to announce that this year's Wenger Scholarship Award goes to Casey Sheridan. Casey has been involved in the Youth Court program as a member for four years and has been an outstanding contributor to the program. Congratulations Casey!

I refuse to open this essay with a lie—I joined Youth Court because of parental pressure. My mom felt that, since I was considering law as my ultimate career goal, Youth Court would be a good résumé builder. Leave it to my mom to be thinking almost seven years into the future (I joined Youth Court as a juror in seventh grade).

I didn't fall in love with the program immediately. I took maybe one case as juror per year, but when I entered high school, I signed up to be a full-fledged member. This time, it was my choice. Training was fantastic: Pizza, fun people and really interesting conversations. We didn't just learn what would be expected of us in court, we applied it to mock situations for practice. Actual real, live attorneys and judges worked with us and told us about their experiences. They were people with us, joking and answering questions. It was a little intimidating. But it was also completely intriguing.

I do not think I realized exactly what I was doing until my first case as an attorney. I'm not sure I could have been more terrified if it had been my life on trial. Judge and clerk/bailiff had been my previous roles and they required uninspired reading of scripts. Not that it wasn't fun to don the black robe and be introduced as "the Honorable" judge of the evening, but being judge allows you to pay attention to the entire case almost completely objectively, without knowing too many facts before the court date and without having a real stake in the outcome.

It just doesn't hit you that you are influencing someone's life until you are the attorney prosecuting or defending an individual. From then on, you never *not* know. As prosecution, I have to work hard to almost disassociate myself from the defendant. For cases like possession of marijuana, there is almost a pattern to the outcomes. But when the case is different, something a little more unusual, and I have to prosecute someone who looks like he or she is truly repentant, it can hurt to be the one cross-examining them because they are obviously intimidated by what you are doing.

I remember one case like this that involved a stolen bike. The defendant was manifestly sorry about what he had done—he had written apology letters and talked to the victim before ever appearing in Youth Court. I felt honestly sorry for him when I prosecuted the case, but I knew that some sort of punishment had to be handed down, because there was still the possibility that the defendant would repeat his crime, or another one like it. In cases like this, as prosecution, you need to know that you are doing the right thing and not become petty and judgmental. A defendant who is visibly sorry and has little probability of committing future crimes does not need 150 hours of community service. It would just be cruel and counter-productive. Each case, though, is different and requires a different approach.

As defense attorney, however, the relationship with the defendant is vastly unlike the prosecutor's. I get to know the individual on trial, everything from their chores at home, to their grades in school, to their extracurricular activities. One case I had, my defendant was scared witless. I could see that he needed someone to explain exactly what was going to happen, because otherwise there was the possibility that he would spook and not be able to testify during the case. Really, all he needed was a little calming reassurance. When we got to trial, he did break down a little bit while telling the court what had happened, but he also accomplished what he had wanted to: He apologized for what he had done and showed everyone there that he was truly remorseful. I left court that night feeling that I had done something worthwhile because the trial had aired things that the defendant had needed to come to light and I thought that he would do really well afterward. It was the small scare he needed to really make him see how quickly everything could spiral out of control.

Youth Court has introduced me to so many people, and so many experiences. I have grown as a speaker, so much that I only get a few butterflies in my stomach before showing my case as an attorney, instead of a zoo-ful. I understand more what I am doing, that it is not a game or a simple résumé booster, but that I am actually effecting a change. I like to think that I have helped the community, at least a little bit. If I did, I still have a few more months to be of use. If not, I still have a few more months to prove my worth. Either way, it has given me a level of preparation for my future. No matter what field of law I end up in, I will have the experience of Youth Court to remember and guide my actions. If trial law is in my future, I will try not to consider only one perspective. I will know how it feels to be both defender and prosecutor and be able to use that experience to truly represent my case.

When this is all over, when I graduate from the Youth Court program, I am going to miss it. There really is nothing like it in our community—a peer run trial system is unique, exciting and it allows for a broad range of experiences, for everyone involved.

Bethlehem Youth Court, Inc.

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Bethlehem Youth Court, Inc. is a free of charge service provided for youth regardless of race, creed, color, sex, disability, national origin or religion.

**New Member Graduation
Tuesday April 11th, 2006
Town Hall Auditorium
7PM to 9PM**

Please join us to welcome our new Youth Court members and to thank and congratulate our “retiring” members for their years of dedication and hard work. Connie Mayer, Associate Dean of Albany Law School will be our key note speaker and the Wenger Scholarship Award will be awarded. All are welcome.

Thank you to the BOU for sponsoring this year’s new member training.

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Here are web sites that have additional information about Youth Courts:

www.youthcourt.net This is the National Youth Court Center’s web page. A comprehensive site regarding Youth Court’s across the county.

www.ny;youthcourt;org This is the Association of New York State Youth Courts’ web site.