



# The Case of the State Superman

By Jimmy Olsen aka Alan Schwalbe

On January 30, 2019, the case of *State v. Superman*, was tried in the Moot Court courtroom at the Rutgers School of Law-Camden. The jury's verdict was entered in favor of the Caped Crusader, but the biggest winner in this legal contest was the fifth-grade class at the HB Wilson Elementary School in Camden, New Jersey. Owing to the inspiration of Judge Ingrid French, the Administrative Supervisory Judge of the New Jersey Division of Workers' Compensation, and with assistance and support from the administration and faculty of the HB Wilson Elementary School in Camden, the Camden County Bar Association's Workers' Compensation Committee and the Mount Olivet Baptist Church, the fifth grade students at HB Wilson had the opportunity to have a hands on experience with the justice system. Judge French emphasized the importance of "getting to these kids at an early age." Judge French thinks that it is extremely important to give inner city children an early exposure to positive role models in the justice system. Hopefully, by working with 5th graders, we can provide them with a positive encounter with law enforcement before they are tainted by a negative encounter with police officers, prosecutors, public defenders and the justice system, in general. The Judge added, "The reason I put Superman on trial was to demonstrate what could happen to an honorable man caught in the wrong place at the wrong time."

The mission of the Mock Trial exercise was two-fold; learning about the justice system and exposing the children to judges and attorneys who volunteered to coach them once weekly for five weeks leading up to the trial date. Judge French wrote a factual scenario which was permeated with life lessons and she gave the 5th graders a glimpse of how the rules of evidence are intended to protect witnesses from revealing irrelevant and potentially prejudicial information about their past. The students performed as judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys and jurors, as well as the ancillary roles that allow the justice system to operate such as clerks, bailiffs and sheriff's officers who swear-in witnesses and control the jurors (to the extent that 5th-graders can be controlled).

Marci Hill-Jordan, Esq., co-chairperson of the Camden County Bar Association's Workers' Compensation Committee recruited the attorneys for Judge French's Mock Trial Project. Judge French authored a training manual for the attorney volunteers, while Attorney Hill-Jordan corresponded and coordinated with them before and after the practice sessions. The practice sessions that occurred from December through January at the school were used to provide the students with one-on-one mentoring and helpful hints about the goals of direct and cross-examination and what to emphasize in their opening and closing statements.

Judge French invited Camden County Superior Court Judge Morris Smith, Criminal Division, to speak to the 5th graders and the many parents, teachers, and others assembled on the day of the trial. Judge Smith stressed the importance of viewing his court as "the People's Court, your court." He emphasized that the citizens in Camden should be invested in their city. "The justice system in Camden delivers justice...this is your place to get your justice. This is your community's court. The justice system belongs to all of you." Judge Smith reiterated that the justice system in Camden should not be looked at as "we vs. them." He warned them not to look at their courts like they view the "Eagles vs. Patriots." He urged all present to work together with the community and, when necessary, work with, not against, the justice system. His parting remark was, "don't forget these lessons when you become adults."

The Camden County Bar Association and the Camden County Bar Foundation have a long history of endeavoring to enhance the educational experience of the students in our county, and, especially, those children in Camden's inner city. Many of our members were very happy to devote time away from their practice in this very worthwhile effort. You can see the many members of our Association in the pictures that accompany this article. We will continue these efforts to support and serve all the members of our community. Judge French has lofty goals for the continuation of the program. She is hopeful that something that was said or done during the interactions between the students, attorneys and judges will leave an indelible positive impression on the students. Many of the students engaged in discussions with attorney volunteers about what it takes to be a lawyer or judge and at one of the practice sessions Judge French reminded all of them that the background check required for her judgeship covered her life from 14 years of age forward.

Judge French would like to incorporate the Camden County Police Department in future programs. In the early 1990's Judge French took six years off from practicing law to administer the "Weed & Seed" program in the City of Wilmington, DE. She is a strong advocate for prevention and community policing. Judge French understands that most inner city youth will have their first encounter with the justice system when they encounter a police officer in their neighborhood. A "cop on the beat" who knows where a young person lives and goes to school and knows his or her family dynamics will have a less adversarial relationship with the community that he or she is policing. The words that Judge French left the students with were both incredibly instructive and somewhat frightening. "If a policeman knows your name he's a lot less likely to pull a gun on you." The parents and community advocates in attendance thanked Judge French for infusing the Mock Trial Project with her culturally specific insights.



