

## BAR NEWS

### Mock Trial experience helps Mason make transition to district court bench

BY JENNIFER ROSINSKI  
AND EVIN LUONGO

More than 20 years of volunteering as a judge for the Massachusetts Bar Association's Mock Trial Program was one long dress rehearsal for Judge Mark D Mason, who was appointed to the bench last year.

"My experiences with Mock Trial have really helped to familiarize me with being a judge," said Mason, an MBA past president whose tenure on the bench began in January 2009. "At the time that I was sworn in, I had many civil and criminal mock trials under my belt. This really helped me in my transition."

Mason, now sitting in Springfield District Court, was appointed to fill a vacancy created by the retirement of Judge William W. Teahan Jr. Previously, Mason was a principal in the litigation department of Cooley Shrair PC in Springfield. He served as MBA president during the 2006-07 association year and was the MBA's first openly gay president.

Mason attributes his successful conversion from attorney to judge to the realistic nature of the MBA's Mock Trial Program, which is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> year with preliminary trials that kicked off last month. Mock trials are based on real legal issues, whether they be criminal or civil, and are argued by students who Mason said often demonstrate capabilities reserved for seasoned counsel. The trials take place in actual courtroom overseen by judges who wear robes and are expected to act the part.

"When I first became a Mock Trial judge, I became acutely aware of the importance of developing your listening skills and focusing your attention on what is being said in court. We oftentimes take for granted the accuracy of listening," Mason said. "Sitting as a Mock Trial judge, I quickly learned I needed to engage in significantly more focused listening, often for more extensive periods of time than I



HON. MARK D. MASON

had to as an attorney."

Seeing high school students acting as attorneys in the courtroom as well as individuals outside of the competition also struck a chord with Mason. In particular, one year he had to present the first runner-up award to the team at Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter Public School in South Hadley. Unknown to Mason, the day of the special assembly coincided with cross-dressing day.

"I'm standing on the stage and behind me, out of the corner of my eye, I see a young man in a dress with a wig. Then, one after another, the team came out in full drag," Mason said, chuckling at the memory. "As bizarre as that story is, what is important to take out of that is regardless of the appearance of counsel before court, I understand and respect that we all have lives outside of court."

All of those experiences as a Mock Trial judge, Mason said, helped build his confidence when it was time for him to start his new role as judge.

"The MBA strives for the highest standards in putting on a Mock Trial," Mason said. "Mock Trials are intended to be accurate replicas of real trials, and my experiences with the program have helped acclimate me to my new position." ■



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