

Community Outreach in the Southern District of California

The Southern District of California has long recognized the importance of community outreach. To that end, the Court offers a variety of programs designed to educate the community on the role of the federal court and to foster the public's trust in the judicial system. These programs include Judges in the Classroom, Open Doors to the Federal Courts, Credit Abuse Resistance Education, Court Connection, and Lifelong Learning opportunities. CASD's Community Outreach Programs Committee, co-chaired by District Judge Janis Sammartino and Magistrate Judge Barbara Major, coordinates the court's outreach objectives and advertises and implements those efforts in the community. CASD employees are recruited to participate in these court-sponsored programs, as well as certain literacy-promoting activities coordinated through a partnership with the San Diego County Bar Association. In 2011, the court hosted 20 separate educational events for various members of the community, welcoming over 800 students, ages 6-80+, to the court. By August, 2012, CASD has already surpassed that number by hosting over 825 students in 15 different events.

Judges in the Classroom

Since 1993, CASD judges have traveled to local elementary, middle and high schools to give presentations on the federal judicial system, federal jurisdiction and the law, or to oversee mock trials. Nearly all of the Southern District's judges are panel members and make themselves available to teachers wishing to integrate this program into their curriculum. Teachers are also invited to bring their classes on a field trip to the courthouse where students participate in mock trials in an authentic environment and also have an opportunity to tour the U.S. Marshal's Office. Students as young as 6 have participated in the Three Little Pigs mock trial, giving them an understanding of the importance of our judicial system at an early age. The judges strive to help and encourage students to embrace the concepts of justice and responsibility, to clarify for them the responsibilities of the individual within a free society, to familiarize the students with career opportunities within the legal system, and to convey the message that students who work hard in school will achieve success. By providing a positive influence that leads to the success of students in our schools, our judges believe that the entire community will reap benefits in the future.



Open Doors to the Court

Since 2006, the Southern District of California has invited high school students to the courthouse to participate in the Open Doors to the Federal Courts Program. Hundreds of high school seniors from a variety of San Diego high schools have participated in the program over the years. CASD's Open Doors program is divided into three separate sections: a federal law enforcement and court careers panel, a mock trial in which the students take on all the roles from defendant to



juror, and, perhaps most importantly, a Credit Abuse Resistance Education (CARE) segment taught by the Bankruptcy Court. Judges and court staff, attorneys from the local bar, and officers from many federal agencies come together to provide this amazing opportunity for young adults to learn about their rights and civic responsibilities as well as job opportunities they may not have previously considered.



Court Connection

In 2012, District Judge Janis Sammartino and Senior District Judge Jeffrey Miller created a committee to provide a professional development program for teachers. The committee is comprised of the Clerk of Court, members of the San Diego Unified School District, the Community Outreach Coordinators for both the District Court and the San Diego Superior Court, and the Director of the California, On My Honor program. The committee designed a workshop focused on the judicial branch of government, emphasizing the important role of the jury and critical thinking in trials. The 7 ½ hour pilot presentation will be given to 25 high school teachers. The teachers will have the opportunity to observe live court, speak one-on-one with federal judges and participate in a mock trial about texting while driving. The teachers will be given all the materials for the mock trial to take back to the classroom and present to their students. After completing the presentation in their classrooms, teachers will be encouraged to enroll their students in the Mock Trial Competition hosted by the San Diego Superior Court. The goal of this collaboration is to provide teachers with tools to promote civic responsibility, good citizenship and impartiality, important subjects in which polls indicate American students may be falling behind.

Lifelong Learners



CASD also offers continuing education for lifelong learners. Programs are offered to local colleges, community organizations, and senior centers, affording adults a rare opportunity to get a behind-the-scenes glimpse of our judicial system and a chance to speak with a federal judge and other legal professionals associated with the District Court. The purpose of this outreach is to offer citizens an opportunity to witness their judicial system in action and to see how effectively and efficiently their tax dollars are being spent by the judiciary.

Literacy-promoting activities

In partnership with the San Diego County Bar Association, CASD participates in several programs designed to promote literacy in the community. The San Diego Book Project is a non-profit organization supported by the San Diego County Bar Association whose purpose is to collect books through donations, and, in turn, redistribute them to schools, hospitals, literacy groups and other deserving organizations at no cost. Many schools and other organizations, both

public and private, are experiencing enormous financial difficulties these days, and libraries and book acquisition programs have been particularly hard hit. One Saturday of every month volunteers from non-profit organizations come to the Book Project to gather books for their constituents. Volunteers must sort and organize the donated books for distribution to the appropriate recipients. A second program supported by CASD employees is Porter Readers. This is a program in which judges and other CASD employees form teams of 4-5 readers who “adopt” individual classrooms of primary students. Once a week, one member of the team travels to the school and spends a half hour reading to the class. Finally, Literacy Days are held twice annually (on March 2 and June 2). Judges, CASD staff and other “guest readers” visit local schools and read to students.