

Legal professionals needed for Contra Costa County High School Mock Trial

Submitted by Jonathan Lance

Bay Area soon-to-be, practicing, and retired law professionals are invited to provide assistance to their future colleagues at the upcoming 40th Annual Contra Costa County High School Mock Trial Program, held live and virtually on seven weekday early evenings, during January and February. Last year, close to 80 Bay Area practicing and retired attorneys and sworn judges, as well as third-year law students, volunteered their time with the mock trial competitions.

Coordinated by the Contra Costa County Office of Education (CCOE), the annual mock trial competition is a hands-on educational program created to help high school students acquire a working knowledge of our judicial system, develop analytical abilities and communication skills, and gain an understanding of their obligations and responsibilities as participating members of our society.

This year's case, *People v. Croddy*, is the trial of Lee Croddy, the host of a popular YouTube channel called *The Right Choice of News (RCN)*, who has been charged with two counts: (1) aiding and abetting in the commission of first-degree burglary by another, and (2) accessory after the fact. This case will also feature a pre-trial argument on the Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination and as set forth in *Miranda v. Arizona*.

"It is always so impressive to see the students prosecute and defend so professionally in the courtroom," Contra Costa County Superintendent of

Schools Lynn Mackey said. "It is even more impressive that these students are still excited to compete in a virtual courtroom. No doubt, a lot of time has been spent preparing for their time in court. In addition, the attorneys and judges serving as volunteers are always in awe of what they have witnessed in the Mock Trial courtroom."

Teams of high school students work with teachers and volunteer coaches to prepare their version of the criminal case from both the prosecution and defense perspectives. Students assume the roles of pre-trial and trial attorneys, witnesses, clerks, bailiffs, artists, and court journalists. Judges and attorneys score their performance and provide immediate feedback. Winning teams advance through seven rounds of competition. The county's champion advances to the state finals. This year, there will be 18 Mock Trial teams competing, including teams from Acalanes, Campolindo and Miramonte high schools.

Via Zoom meetings, volunteers will view and score two competing schools that argue the case in their assigned court. Each night will begin with a 15-minute rules and regulations training, then the volunteers will go into their assigned Zoom "courtrooms" to serve as Mock Trial judge and scorers.

Interested volunteers can learn more by visiting the CCCOE's Mock Trial website (https://www.ccoecoe.k12.ca.us/programs/for_parents_students/academic_events/mock_trial/volunteers), or contacting Jonathan Lance at (925) 942-3429.

Schedule for 2021 Contra Costa County High School Mock Trials:
 Preliminaries: Jan. 26, 28; Feb. 2, 4 – 5 to 8 p.m. (Eight competitions each night)
 Quarterfinals: Feb. 9, 5 to 8 p.m. (Four competitions)
 Semifinals: Feb. 11, 5 to 8 p.m. (Two competitions)
 Final and Consolation: Feb. 16, 5 to 8 p.m. (Two competitions)

Lamorinda Idol winter finalists announced



L.A.M.E. 2020: Audrie Blank, Ellia Blank, Levi Kim and Mia Wooton

By Sora O'Doherty

Lamorinda Idol finalists in categories including kindergarten through second grade, third through fifth grade, sixth through eighth grade and high school have been named by the Lamorinda Arts Council. There are over 90 entries, some individuals, some groups, competing as soloists or groups. Videos of competition performances are now available on YouTube, but the videos of competition final performances are due to the Council on Feb. 28 and will be posted shortly thereafter. Public voting will then be open until March 10. An audience award will be given to that participant who is not a category winner with the highest number of public votes, adjusted for category size and number of total category votes. Winners will be selected by a panel of three judges, and will be announced in a live online event at 7 p.m. Sunday, March 14. Winners will receive cash prizes ranging from \$100 to \$400.

The Lamorinda Idol event is chaired by Steve Harwood. The competition, which is open to all

students in Contra Costa County, will be judged by "a total of eight judges," according to Harwood, "all with musical backgrounds; the judges have been assigned three to a category; and the combined votes of the three judges determined the finalists in each category."

Available videos include full performances, as well as short compilation videos with a 30-second clip of each singer in each category. Videos of the finalists can be viewed at <https://lamorindaarts.org/lamorinda-idol-winter-finalists/>



Clea Lee Photos courtesy Lamorinda Arts Council

Community Service: We are pleased to make space available whenever possible for some of Lamorinda's dedicated community service organizations to submit news and information about their activities. Submissions may be sent to storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com with the subject header In Service to the Community.

Share Your Celebrations and Remembrances

If you would like to share an announcement about a special event or achievement, such as a wedding, engagement, scholarship or graduation of a local resident, or about a special person from Lamorinda who has passed, send a photo along with your text (up to 250 words) to storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com, and include "Celebrations and Remembrances" in the subject line.

Local church offers help to community's food insecure



A sample of food offered at the new food pantry at Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church.

Photo provided

Submitted by Renie Gannett

A new food pantry located at Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church opened in November and is available to anyone in the community feeling the need to stretch their dollars a bit. At the culmination of such a trying year, Renie Gannett, one of the church staff, felt there might be a need for this type of service in Lamorinda and began to gather food. The generosity of church and community members has been

overwhelming. There is a large selection of staples each week to satisfy from dawn to dusk – cereals, power bars, canned goods, baking mixes, soups, pasta, and everything in between. The MVPC Food Pantry is a "U-Pick" format, allowing people to select what is best for them and their family. It is an essential service open from 5 to 6:30 p.m. every Wednesday evening in Rooms 201-202 at MVPC off the lower courtyard. Masks and social distancing protocols are in effect.

In Memory

Holly Fisher Baumgartner

Dec. 12, 1956 – Nov. 17, 2020



Holly F. Baumgartner passed away on Nov. 17, 2020 in The Villages, Florida. Born in Boston, Massachusetts on Dec. 21, 1956, she grew up in Moraga, California and graduated from Miramonte High School in 1975, where she was a member of the marching band. She later earned a master's degree in Speech Pathology & Audiology from California State University, Chico.

Holly married James Baumgartner in 1983. They moved to Breckenridge, Colorado in 1994 and then later to Kauai, Hawaii in 1999. They made their final home in The Villages, Florida in 2005. She explored many of the activities The Villages has to offer and

became president of the decorating club. She also became a valued member of the musical community by playing the clarinet for the The Villages Band, the Wind Ensemble and the Orchestra.

She will remain in memory as a loving, kind, caring, affectionate, funny, generous, adventurous, patient, understanding, positive, supportive and beautiful friend. We are all better for knowing her.

She was predeceased by her brother, John Fisher in March 2020, her father, George Fisher, in June 2020. She is survived by her sister, Ann Wright (Tim Wright), of Gainesville, Florida, and her mother, Julie Fisher of The Villages, Florida.

Donations in her memory can be sent to Cornerstone Hospice, 601 Mariposa Way, The Villages, FL 32162.

In Memory

Aras Vytautas Grakauskas



Aras Vytautas Grakauskas, 59, passed away unexpectedly at home in Moraga, California, on the morning of Dec. 30, 2020 after a valiant battle with multiple health challenges. He was a wonderful, devoted husband, father, brother and uncle and leaves a major void in his family's life.

Preceded in death by his grandparents and parents. Survived by loving wife Eleanor, cherished son Cole, and bonus son Karl Lesterhuis; beloved sister and brother in law Asta and Mitch Gersovitz, and nephews Erik and Alex Gersovitz; treasured relatives Milda Lenkauskas, Viktor and Ilona Peteris; cousins Viktorija, Nijole (Kestutis), Siga (Jonas), and Gidas (Egle); and life long, loyal friends Arnas Kungys (godson Martin) and Arunas Sadonis.

Born in Los Angeles to Nijole and Vytautas Grakauskas, Aras grew up in Arcadia, California. In his younger years he played football, wrestled and skied. He was a proud Lithuanian American, who met lifelong friends at Camp Dainava, danced with the LA Spindulys dance troop, and bartended at dances.

Aras was a CPA, had a BA and MS in accounting, and worked for several major accounting firms, most recently as a Senior Manager at Ryan LLC. He was a native Californian who fished in Lake Arrowhead, skydived out of Perris, mountain-biked the Santa Monica mountains, skied Mt. Baldy, Mammoth, and Tahoe. He enjoyed frequent visits with his sister's family on Lake Minnetonka in Minnesota. Happy times were shared fishing with his brother in law and nephew, skiing in Park City, spending Christmas with family, experiencing the MOA and the MN State Fair. Just being with family gave him joy and pride.

Aras enjoyed small town shopping trips, overnight stays in the wine country of Napa and Sonoma, and vacation getaways in Lake Tahoe with his wife Eleanor. He treasured his son Cole beyond measure, and was an ardent, proud supporter at Cole's soccer games, swim meets and Cub Scout activities. Aras passed on his love for skiing to Cole. He was also a steady presence in Karl's life and encouraged the strong connection that Karl made with Cole.

Aras was a kind man of few words. He had a low voice, subtle smile, off beat sense of humor (think Far Side greeting cards), and the stature of Gulliver. On New Year's Day he traditionally wished his best friends "Happy Arbitrary Starting Point." And so it goes that he leaves us at a new, arbitrary starting point. Cheers to a memorable life well lived "Arai"!

Services in Glendale pending, in consideration of the Covid epidemic. Those wishing to make a charitable donation in Aras' memory are encouraged to do so to the Moraga Educational Foundation, German Shepherd Rescue of Northern California, or The Wounded Warrior Project or their favorite charity.