



Photo courtesy Mohave County

Mohave County Prosecutor Derek Carlisle points at student defendant Andrew Vellioidis during his opening statement telling the jury why the defendant must be convicted of theft in “The Case of the Stolen Crayons” mock trial held at Cerbat Elementary School on Law Day, May 1.

## Court convened at elementary schools

KINGMAN – Mohave County Court professionals brought law and order to two elementary schools Thursday, May 1.

In conjunction with May 1 being the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Law Day, Judge Lee Jantzen and other court and law enforcement personnel joined with student council members from Cerbat and Palo Christi elementary schools to perform mock trials at their respective schools involving “The Case of the Stolen Crayons.” With the Earl Stanley Gardner-like title, a prosecutor and a defense attorney attempted to convince the student juries of the guilt or innocence of the mock-defendants. “We have a student paired with each of our court personnel,” Assistant Jury Commissioner Doreen Ruggles



Mohave County Court Clerk Sowande Brown-Lawson (from left) and student assistant Noah Stout swear in student defendant Andrew Vellioidis during a mock trial held on Law Day, May 1, at Cerbat Elementary School.

said. “They are all members of the student council.”

At Cerbat, Jantzen was teamed

with student co-judge Myra Ledezma during the morning mock court; in the afternoon, at Palo Christi, he was teamed with Kiersten Kinsley. Court Clerk Sowande Brown-Lawson's Cerbat assistant was Noah Stout and his Palo Christi assistant was Alexis McDade. Prosecutor Derek Carlisle was assisted by Reanna Perez in the morning and Mariah Serl in the afternoon. Legal Defender Eric Beiningen's Cerbat co-counsel was Joe Biggs and Jennifer Grammer-Ruggles assisted him at Palo Christi. Chance Dollarhide shadowed Doreen Ruggles at Cerbat while Katie Ruggles handled that job at Palo Christi. Court Reporter Linda Cantrell was assisted by Megan Huggins in the morning and Jamie Lynn Gonzales in the afternoon.

Law enforcement officers also were involved in sharing their portions of the law and justice system.

Kingman Police Detective Gabe Otero testified in the case with his assistant Tamere Srour in the morning and Rheannon Darrington in the afternoon. Sgt. Russell Grogan from County Detention acted as transport officer.

Student volunteers Andrew Velliodis from Cerbat and Jimmy Childs from Palo Christi were stripe-wearing defendants.

"This is fun to see the kids get excited and involved," Jantzen said. "It's good to see everyone from the courthouse here (Cerbat Elementary School) showing kids there is something else other than computer games. In my job, I see kids who are not doing well. In this case, I am seeing kids who ARE doing well."

Carlisle worked hard to convince the Cerbat jury of defendant Velliodis' guilt during the Cerbat trial. However, Beiningen was able to show that "shadow of a doubt" to the jury.

The Cerbat clerk read the verdict. "We the jury do find the defendant not guilty of the crime of the theft of the box of crayons," Stout read. However, the Palo Christi jury found defendant Childs guilty.

"I think that this is a very good program to get the kids educated about the process," Carlisle said. "Hopefully they will become interested, excited and not intimidated by (the court). Perhaps someday they may become lawyers, judges, police officers or somehow be involved in the court system. That would be neat. They may even be on a jury. By being exposed to the legal process, they will realize this is an important process and they won't be intimidated by it. I think this is an important program."

"The jury has done a very good job here," Jantzen said at Cerbat. "They might even think he may have done it, but they don't think the state has proven its case beyond a reasonable doubt."

The members of the Cerbat jury were Will Partridge, Heather Melius, Andrea Heer, Timothy Lutz, Jordan Lambert, Maycee Kabanek, Allen Steinberger, Anthony Ellery, Nathaniel Reyes, Rebecca Fondren, Dalton Albert, John Cottrell, Laura Faber and Dominic Dubay.

The members of the Palo Christi jury were Julia Moll, Baily Hammond, Kye Hill, Kama Salazar, Alex Schneider, Max Serl, Jordan Schlund, Brody McCloud and Natasha Garrison.

One of the witnesses who testified during the Cerbat trial was Robert Pope, fourth grade teacher and student council representative. "I thought it was amazing," he said. "The kids get to shadow someone who works in the court. They get to learn about the

court system and see a trial. They were really excited about it before the trial. I really think it was a very good experience.”

Cerbat student court clerk Noah Stout said he really enjoyed the experience. Following the court, Stout said he hoped to grow up and become a “judge, clerk or an archeologist.” And, when asked, he said he is looking forward to the new Indiana Jones movie.

“I think this is a wonderful experience for the kids,” Cerbat Principal Dawn McGill said. “I don’t think they realized what all goes into court proceedings. They were quite attentive. And to have the student council involved and able to shadow the court personnel is awesome.”