

Verdict is in

Wheaton College mock trial team earns championship bid in first full season

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Last year, Wheaton College assembled a mock trial team and set out with a goal of making it to nationals.

Mission accomplished.

In its first full season, the team of would-be lawyers will head to Memphis this weekend, March 23-25, to compete in the American Mock Trial Association's Opening Round Championship Series against other top-performing schools.

"They're very excited," said Diane Michalak, a DuPage County prosecutor and one of the team's three

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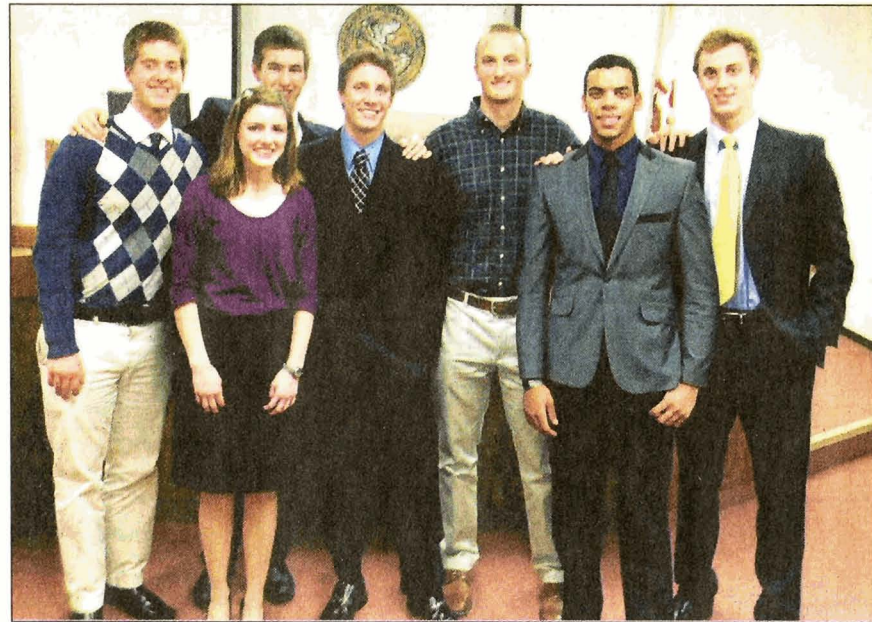
Diane Michalak

roles of prosecutors, defense attorneys and witnesses. Local attorneys and judges rate each performance

coaches. "This was one of our goals at the beginning of the year. We've made it in our first full season, so we're really proud of ourselves."

At mock trials, students simulate civil or criminal trials based on fictional allegations. This year, it's the reckless homicide case of an allegedly drunken driver charged with killing a state's attorney's daughter in the fictional county of Breckenridge in the fictional state of Midlands.

Students work from fictional affidavits to fill the



COURTESY OF DIANE MICHALAK

Members of Wheaton College's mock trial team are Jason Chapman, from left, Abby Canfield, John Patrick, Trenton Van Oss, Andrew Bayer, Dez Cato and McNair Nichols. Not pictured are coaches Brooks Locke, Diane Michalak and Eric Pierce, and team members Kenzie Sullivan and David Washko.

on a scale of one to 10. There also are awards for outstanding attorneys and witnesses.

"The witnesses can go real far into character if they want. You've got some people showing up in full police gear," Michalak said.

Wheaton College got to this point by placing ninth out of 24 teams in February's regional competition at the University of Notre Dame. Only the top eight teams immediately qualify for

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nationals, but the college won an at-large bid after teams from Northwestern University landed four of the top eight positions. Each school can take no more than two teams to the championship series.

Team captain Trenton Van Oss said he enjoyed

participating in mock trial while attending high school at Eden Christian Academy in Wexford, Pa., which sparked his interest in forming a team last year as a freshman at Wheaton College.

"I loved mock trial in high school and was able to learn a lot about the way our legal system works from participating

in it," said Van Oss, who won an All-Region Outstanding Attorney Award. "I think it's a fun, educational and important activity for anyone who's considering law school, and I wanted to give myself and other Wheaton students the opportunity to compete at the college level."

At nationals, Wheaton

College will go up against Northwestern, Vanderbilt University, the University of Georgia, and Gonzaga University, among others. The top six finalists proceed to the championship tournament in Minneapolis in April.

For information, visit www.collegemocktrial.org.