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## Kids Learn, Laugh During Mock Trial In County Courtroom

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BROOKSVILLE - Like many court cases, the decision was a tough one.

On one side, attorneys painted a picture of a concerned "B.B. Wolf," short for Big Bear Wolf, who feared that his friend, the little pig, may have fallen and hurt himself. Since the pig did not have a medical alert necklace and was not answering the door, he decided to check on him by climbing down the chimney, where he burned his rear end by falling into a cauldron of boiling water.

But on the other side, the pig told a different story: B.B. Wolf, short for Big Bad Wolf, had eaten the pig's two brothers and terrorized generations of local pigs. Furthermore, the pig was merely watching a cooking show on TV and preparing a meal of coyote stew in his fireplace, where he routinely cooks to avoid steaming up his house.

"If I'm guilty of anything, it's having an appetite and protecting my home," the pig told the courtroom.

Seated inside a courtroom in the Hernando County Courthouse in Brooksville, dozens of wide-eyed, second-grade jurors listened attentively, taking every word and detail into account.

Wednesday marked the one day each year that several local attorneys - including Brooksville-based attorney Jason Melton who played the pig - volunteer for law week, or an annual week of planned educational activities designed to teach young people about the courts and justice system.

The audience was made up of second-graders from Challenger K-8 School of Science and Mathematics in Spring Hill and homeschooled students of various ages.

Three student judges sat alongside County Judge Don Scaglione, while others "helped" the attorneys, pig and wolf. Another served as a bailiff, while others assisted the court's clerks.

The jury deliberated for what seemed like an eternity, finally finding the pig "not guilty" for the wolf's injuries, played by Brooksville-based attorney Leonard Cagan.

This year, Scaglione arranged for electronic voting machines to be set up in the back of the courtroom so that all of the students could participate.

While the jury did acquit the pig, the audience votes proved otherwise, 32-19.

"What trial are you guys watching? Let you all be grateful that we have a jury system in this country," Melton joked.

Each year, the attorneys are given a makeshift script to follow, but typically veer off into improvisation.

Last year, the argument went so well that the trial ended in a hung jury, Spring Hill-based attorney Stephen Toner said, who played a witness.

"We have some years that we're laughing so hard at our jokes," Toner said. "Two years ago, some of jokes went completely over the kids' heads, but all of the (chaperones and teachers) were laughing. And we actually had a verdict one year where the wolf was convicted of a criminal charge."

Most of all, however, the attorneys enjoy the opportunity to make a positive impression on kids' perceptions of the legal world, Toner said.

Hernando County Sheriff Richard Nugent, who spoke briefly at the event, agreed.

"It's pretty funny to watch, and the kids can relate," he said. "They get to see how government works, particularly the court system, and I just think it's awesome."

Challenger student Katlyn Oliver, 8, who helped Brooksville-based attorney Michael John Brannigan defend the pig, said she enjoyed the interactive field trip.

"It was fun and interesting," she said. "I felt like I got to do something new. "


A different cast of attorneys was slated to participate Thursday for other Hernando County children.

"Hopefully we'll never see them here, but you never know when it's going to touch a kid's heart," Nugent added. "It may spur some of them to become an attorney or judge."

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