

Lawyers flex creative muscle to commemorate Law Day

By AdvocateDaily.com Staff

As [Law Day](#) approaches, mock trials have become a favourite community activity among Ontario's Law Associations, says Katie Robinette, executive director of the [Federation of Ontario Law Associations](#) (FOLA).

"We're always encouraging our associations to get really involved in the community, not just amongst their membership, but to reach outside of it," Robinette says, pointing to Law Day, which is held on April 17 this year. "It recognizes the anniversary of the signing of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms."

While the Charter has been cited as ranking as one of Canada's most important symbols, "most Canadians do not really know it's history, nor can they articulate what's really in it – especially our youth," she says.

Enter mock trials, which are targeted at high school students and run in different formats and various communities from March through May, Robinette says.

"We find it's a good way to get people interested in law early," she says.

Robinette says mock trials provide a unique way for students to understand vital aspects of the law as outlined in the Charter and the Constitution.

"We want young people to know about its history and get involved – all while learning valuable debating skills in a proper format in a forum run by lawyers and with the involvement of judges, she says.

With recent stories in the media about Ontario and Quebec using the notwithstanding clause, there is a general understanding that governments can use it to override laws. But Robinette says mock trials give students the chance to understand the content of the laws and why things have been implemented the way they have.

She says students involved in the mock trials can also learn about the push and pull of rights, noting that free speech under the Charter is not absolute.

"There are some instances where we don't have complete freedom of expression. For example, with hate speech, the courts have agreed there are limits on free speech to protect Canadians," she says. "Mock trials can give high school teachers an excuse to really delve into this issue."

In Peel region, lawyers organize tiered mock trial events with regional competitions and a trophy is presented to the winners, Robinette says, adding law schools also become involved in the mock trials.

But there are other initiatives run by practising lawyers to mark Law Day, she says.

In Frontenac county in the Kingston area, Robinette says lawyers go into classrooms and conduct Q&A sessions and present colouring and poster design contests in elementary schools.

“It’s an opportunity for the lawyers to get into the schools and talk about what it’s like on the job to a younger demographic,” she says.

In Thunder Bay, Robinette says high schools compete against each other for the Justice Wright Law Day trophy. The celebrations that follow occur in tandem with a courthouse open house where members of the public can check out the Superior Court judge’s chambers as well as some of the courtrooms and the law association library and lounge. The robes of court officials from decades past are also on display.