



Law Day teaches students about courts, rights

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FRAMINGHAM – Often, a teenager’s first encounter with the judicial system is an unpleasant experience.

On Thursday, Law Day at the Framingham and Natick district courts gave students from Framingham, Natick, Holliston and Keefe Tech high schools the chance to see things in a different light.

“It’s a nice for them to have an experience here in such a good light,” said Middlesex District Attorney Marian Ryan, one of the event’s keynote speaker. “It’s good for them to see us in a nice situation.”

The students saw presentations from different perspectives – those of the judge, prosecutors, probation department, defense lawyers and court officers – on how the system works.

The theme of the day was the 14th Amendment, which addresses citizens’ rights, equality and the right of due process.

“We’ve come a long way in this country, and we still have a long way to come when it comes to equality,” Framingham District Court Judge David Cunis said.

Natasia Tidwell, a former Cambridge Police lieutenant and federal prosecutor, is now a private lawyer who specializes in civil rights.

She said, although the Constitution governs many laws, not all laws are directly listed in the Constitution.

"In 1785, the framers of the Constitution had no clue about what was coming," she said. "Now we have to think about cellphones. People have more personal information on them than they do at home."

Ryan, like Tidwell, said cases have to be taken individually.

"We don't prosecute people for a law no one knows is a law. Why? Because it's unfair," she said. "The law doesn't guarantee everyone gets the same treatment. Should Judge Cunis treat the person here for their first mistake the same as the one here for their 20th mistake?"

Several people received awards on Thursday. Assistant Clerk Bert Schofield was awarded the Robert C. Campion Award, named for retired Framingham District Court judge. The award is to honor community service.

The longtime clerk has donated 29 gallons of blood over the years, as well as donated a kidney to a stranger, Cunis said.

"I just try to do the best I can do," said Schofield. "We all have gifts. I'm a very healthy person. I like to pass it on. Given the chance, if you can donate blood, it really helps people."

Paul Carew, the Natick director of veterans services, was awarded the Paul F. Healy Award for his work with veterans.

Three students won the Robert V. Greco Award for essays they wrote on the 14th Amendment. Framingham High School's Cleopatra Mavhunga won first place, Elizabeth Lewis of Natick High took second and Benjamin Green of Natick High captured third.

"Civil rights has been very important for me," said Mavhunga. "We've been learning about it in class. I put a lot of work into it. I'm very excited."

Marjorie Greco, the wife of Judge Robert Greco who died in 2015, congratulated the winners and participants, and left them with advice based on her husband's thoughts.

"Listen to the stories of others with an open mind, even if you don't think you agree," she said. "Take up a new hobby. Challenge yourself. Get into the habit of reading regularly; add nonfiction to your library. Attend local events and lectures, surround yourself with people who don't think just like you do. And most importantly, always, always remain curious."

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