

# DAILY REPORT

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## Young lawyers sharpen trial skills at clinic

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IN THE QUARTER CENTURY since it began, the annual training course for young lawyers at the University of Georgia School of Law has become an institution itself, evolving as a legacy of and for attorneys across the state and now renamed for one of its longtime leaders.

The Gary Christy Memorial Trial Skills Clinic was held June 23 through June 26 at the law school, drawing 48 young lawyers for four days of intensive practice, critiques and mentoring by 27 experienced attorneys from around the state. Many of the mentors knew and worked with Gary C. Christy, who passed away in 2007 at the age of 52 after complications from surgery. The young lawyers who didn't know Christy learned about him along with their trial training.

"Gary Christy was a spellbinding storyteller," said Stephen J. Harper, director of programs for the Institute of Continuing Legal Education in Georgia and chairman of the clinic. "I've seen him take the notes out of a student's hand and say, 'Now, talk to the witness and we'll get through this.'" Even in closing arguments for mock civil trials, Christy never failed to deliver "goose bumps," Harper said.

"Gary Christy believed that it's part of our duty to help other lawyers become good. You don't get that in law school," said Joseph A. Fried of Fried Rogers Goldberg, one of the clinic's mentors.

"I don't think anyone ever had a superficial conversation with Gary," said another mentor, Michael S. Carlson, deputy chief assistant district attorney for the gang prosecution unit in DeKalb County. "His hopefulness about people in general helped his practice and inspired his students."

"Gary Christy suggested the most effective way to try cases is to simplify your case. Reduce the case to two or three simple truths," clinic mentor and Pataula Judicial Circuit Superior

Court Judge Ronnie Joe Lane of Donalsonville wrote in the clinic's training manual. The judge added, "Gary said it should appear as though you are dancing with the witnesses, but you must be leading."

Some of the advice came in the two mock trials—one a criminal case involving a murder and the other a civil case over slander. More came in breaks, meals and hallway conversations.

"Georgia is very fortunate to have lawyers who come here on their own dime to help other lawyers," said Harper.

Here's a sampling of their advice.

- Learn to connect with the people on the jury. Fried stopped a lawyer in a mock presentation to suggest he move closer to the box. "These people are everything," he said. In the hallway later, Fried added, "You can't try a case to a jury. You've got to try the case to individual jurors. You've learned about them in voir dire. You've invaded their privacy in voir dire. A smart lawyer doesn't just fold up the notebook at the end of voir dire. Use it to relate to the jurors." Fried suggested that trial lawyers remember what kind of car the jurors drive or what their hobbies are and relate the story to their interests.

- Lane, from his experience as a judge, advised the students never to open a question with, "Would it be fair to say?" Likewise,

never ask, "Is it possible?" And never follow an answer with, "OK." All of these dilute the impact of the questions.

- Always finish strong with a witness. "Save back one question," said Susan W. Cox of Edenfield, Cox, Bruce & Classens in Statesboro. Or even repeat a question if you have to end. As an example from the mock case, Cox suggested, "But Parker Bowles is dead and you pulled the trigger, didn't you?"

- Remember "it's your question you want the jury to hear, not the answer." This comes also from Lane, who suggested, voice slightly raised, "You shot him, didn't you? And then you shot him again, didn't you?"

- Never "waste your crack at the witness." Morris H. Wiltshire Jr. of Prior, Daniel & Wiltshire in Athens advised getting straight to the point. He suggested one student "chased a rabbit" with a line of questioning that lost focus on the smoking gun.

- "You can't practice law alone." This came from Harper, who emphasized to the students the importance of depending on the advice and counsel of colleagues.

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