

American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division
The Affiliate

Sarasota Young Lawyers Publish Civics Magazine for School Kids

Compiled by Jill Kastner

Nothing is more important to the future of Sarasota County than informed young people who understand and care about county government and the legal system. That's why the Sarasota County Bar Association Young Lawyers Division (YLD) joined forces with the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* to complete and publish "Celebrate Freedom, Celebrate Civics" magazine.

"Our YLD had been doing a variety of programs for Law Week for a number of years," said Daniel C. Guarnieri, Chair of the Sarasota YLD's Public Service Committee. "We had traditionally provided programs to and through local schools, as it allowed us to reach a large number of students efficiently. So, when we started looking for new programs, the natural place to start was with the school board's programs director. She told us that the current curriculum in Sarasota County was somewhat lacking in civics education (an issue that is currently being remedied by changes to the curriculum), and that supplementary materials in that area would be extremely useful. She also recommended that we contact the *Sarasota Herald Tribune's* Newspapers in Education (NIE) Director to see if a partnership was possible."

From that, a new program was born. YLD members wrote content for the school-age publication on topics such as citizenship, the Bill of Rights, the branches of government, and a comparison of federal, state, and local law. The *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* helped edit, provided graphic design services, and printed the magazine.

Schools distributed the magazines on September 15, 2009, in conjunction with Constitution Day. Over 40,000 copies were given to fourth through twelfth grade public school students. Additional copies will be distributed to private schools, the Boys and Girls Club, and the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

In addition to creating the magazine, a comprehensive teacher's guide was developed to provide a supplemental set of exercises. The guide includes a list of activities that can be used on interactive white boards or computers, research projects using electronic editions of the *Herald-Tribune* and the Internet, and exercises that combine current events with the founding documents of our country.

The *Herald-Tribune* hosted a training session for a group of teachers using the magazine. The session was led by several attorneys who wrote the articles, along with Bernadette Bennett, program Specialist for K-12 Social Studies in Sarasota County Schools. Funding for the project was provided by the YLD Board of Governors of The Florida Bar, The Florida Bar Foundation, the Sarasota County Bar Association, and the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*.

"We've received great feedback from the schools and consider the program to be a smashing success," said Guarnieri. "It is our intention to continue the program yearly. The topics will change each year, and we intend to work closely with both the school board and the *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* to identify areas of interest to teachers and students."

Law and government are not about abstract rules or dry facts. They are about how people use the rules and facts to get things done. Law-related education (LRE) serves as a tool to help youth connect their values to civic participation and become the kind of active citizens democracy depends on.

To other affiliates thinking about doing a similar program, Guarnieri advises that "partnerships are key. The level of work involved is substantial, and it requires coordination between many groups and individuals. . . . I think our program was especially successful because we identified a specific need in the community early on, and then brought the people together who could address that need. That little bit of work on the front side made the project much more successful in the end."