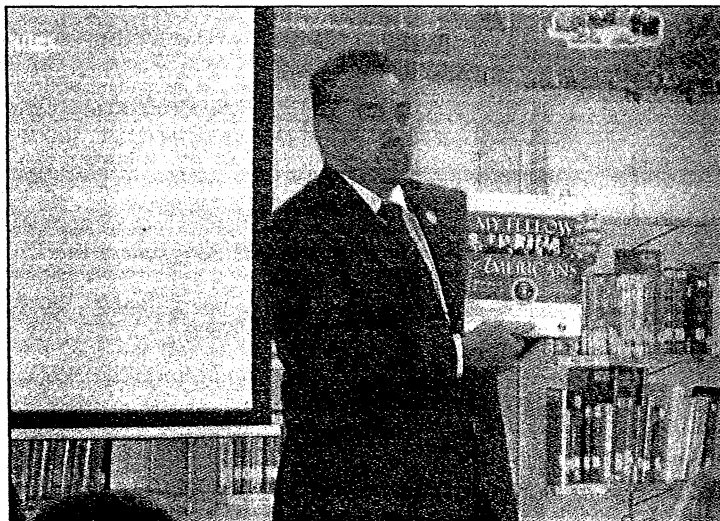


# Constitution Day brings attorneys out into school communities



LEGAL NEWS PHOTO BY CYNTHIA PRICE

David Bevins, left, and Bruce Courtade, both of Rhoades McKee, told students about the signers of the Constitution.



Bruce Courtade holds up one of several books he donated to Shawmut Hills' library in honor of the day. My Fellow Americans included a CD with the actual voices of U.S. presidents delivering important speeches.

by Cynthia Price  
Legal News

If Tuesday's Constitution Day presentation at Shawmut Hills Elementary are any indication, Rhoades McKee attorneys David Bevins and Bruce Courtade would have made excellent elementary school teachers.

On a subject that could have been dry and uninteresting, both Bevins and Courtade were able to explain constitutional issues in language that fifth graders could understand, without talking down to their young audience.

As a result, the students paid attention to a surprising degree, and walked out of the Shawmut Hills library expressing enthusiasm and interest in the subject.

Constitution Day celebrates the signing of the U.S. Constitution on Sept. 17, 1787. The Grand Rapids Bar Association and its charitable arm, the Justice Foundation of West Michigan, have long been committed to educating about the government and the constitution and how they fit with the profession of law.

Attorneys visited (or will visit) every fifth grade in the Grand Rapids Public School District, an impressive volunteer effort on the part of the GRBA as well as the participating lawyers. See below for a complete list.

In addition, Fifth Third Bank funded distribution of an informational pamphlet to all 1500 Grand Rapids fifth-graders. The booklets included a flow chart of how the three branches of government interact with each other and a quiz about the Constitution.

At Shawmut Hills, where two fifth-grade classes joined the attorneys in the media center, Courtade impressed the students by showing a PowerPoint slide of the very bus that carried Rosa Parks on her famous civil rights ride.

Courtade had visited the Henry Ford Museum, where the bus resides, when he was at the State Bar of

Michigan annual meeting in Dearborn last week.

Most of the students had heard of Rosa Parks. Courtade told them how he had been able to sit in the very seat she had refused to give up to a white person, and the students asked a lot of questions. Stating that the victory Parks and other activists won in the 1960s was evidence of "the Constitution's enduring power to preserve and protect the rights of every person in the United States," Courtade also emphasized that the event shows the power of just one person.

Bevins took the lead in explaining the separation of powers. As he and Courtade gently led the classes through an explanation of the three branches of government, it was clear there was a lot of confusion, but that seemed to lift somewhat as the students thought it over.

Finally, one young man raised his hand and asked, "So the president doesn't make the laws?" Righting that very common misunderstanding among elementary-age students was a breakthrough, and the two attorneys went on to explain the veto power as well as the president's role in advocating for potential legislation.

Other lawyers who presented on Sept. 20 were: Margaret Allen, Brookside Elementary; Todd Almæssian, Burton Elementary; Mike Cole, Covell Elementary; Tom Behm, Harrison Park Elementary; Kenyatta Brame, Mulick Elementary; Tracey Brame, Mulick Elementary; Liz Bransdorfer, Brookside Elementary; Jeremy Brieve, Southwest Community Campus; Nikole Canute, Congress Elementary; Stephanie Cardenas, Cesar E. Chavez Elementary; Ann Cooper, CA Frost Environmental Science Academy; Bob Cooper, CA Frost Environmental Science Academy; Alexander F. Denton (Alec), Sherwood Park

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Global Studies; Stephen Drew, Palmer Elementary; Greg Ekdahl, Covell Elementary; Cindy Faulkner, Sibley Elementary; Joy Fossel, Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Academy; Heather Garretson, Sibley Elementary; Bridget Tucker-Gonder, Ken-O-Sha Elementary; Dwight Hamilton, Buchanan Elementary; Phil Henderson, Sherwood Park Global Studies; Rachel Hillegonds, Buchanan Elementary; Anita Hitchcock, Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Academy; LaRissa Hollingsworth, East Leonard

Elementary; Dustin Jackson, Palmer Elementary; Marcus Jones, Southwest Community Campus; Susan Wilson Keener, Aberdeen Elementary; Katherine Kennedy, Kent Hills Elementary; Hon. Benjamin Logan, Cesar E. Chavez Elementary; Elizabeth Lykins, North Park Elementary; Scott Melton, Harrison Park Elementary; Nelson Miller, Sibley Elementary; Benjamin Mills, Harrison Park Elementary; Bill Mills, Harrison Park Elementary; Bruce Neckers, Shawnee Park Elementary; Tom Saxe, Shawnee Park Elementary; Devin Schindler, Ken-O-Sha

Elementary; Mark Smith, Kent Hills Elementary; Jan Strand, Buchanan Elementary; Stephanie Szydlowski, Kent Hills Elementary; Christine Tober, North Park Elementary; Suanne Watt-Stay, North Park Montessori; Julie Westra, Southwest Community Campus; Ben White, Burton Elementary; and Bob Wolford, Buchanan Elementary.

Some schools were not in session last Tuesday, so the following attorneys will visit on Sept. 27: Bill Azkoul, Grand Rapids Montessori; James Booth Burr, Dickinson Elementary; Rich Leonard, Dickinson Elementary; Raquel

Olivo, Campus Elementary; Lynn Perry, Coit Creative Arts Academy; Angela Ross, Campau Park Elementary; Paul Sorensen, Grand Rapids Montessori Academy; Ruth Stevens, Campau Park Elementary; Matt Vicari, Campus Elementary; and Bob Wright, Grand Rapids Montessori.

One objective of the program was to afford an opportunity for young people to see lawyers in a positive light. Such a distinguished list of presenters increases the likelihood that all of the students will be left with a favorable impression of the legal profession.