

LAWYERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION IN HI-Y'S YOUTH IN GOVERNMENT

By David King

Photography by Don Ryan

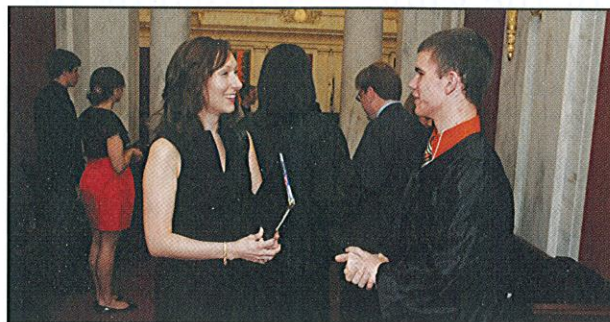
W. Richard Staton, chairman of the Ohio-West Virginia YMCA's West Virginia HI-Y Youth in Government Committee, convened the opening session of the 53rd annual Youth in Government program on April 30 in the House of Delegates. More than 250 West Virginia high school students served as legislators, Supreme Court justices, officers, members of the press, lobbyists and pages during the three-day session. President of the Senate and Lt. Governor Earl Ray Tomblin's keynote address to the group commended the students for their involvement in government and challenged them to become the next generation of leaders West Virginia expects.

Once the hour-long opening session concluded, the next three days were full of legislative committee and floor sessions as students considered legislative proposals they had written. Other students were hearing appeals to the Student Supreme Court of Appeals. Youth officers conducted all sessions and a youth press covered all the proceedings, while youth lobbyists worked to influence legislation.

David Flannery with Jackson Kelly is a longtime Youth in Government volunteer who said he has seen the positive results of the program in his son.

"This program works," Flannery said. "Every year I see young people learn and gain confidence as they prepare for and then conduct these sessions. I volunteer on the Youth in Government committee and my firm supports this program because we see noticeable results in these young people. We need more students to have this opportunity."

Wyoming County Prosecutor W. Richard Staton, a product of Youth in Government, now serves as chair-



Top: Alex Trembly (newly elected 2011 Youth in Government Chief Justice) talks with Courtney Kirtley. **Below:** Jaci Goodwin (2010 Youth in Government Chief Justice) speaks with Laurel Basil.

man of Youth in Government. He stepped in to lead the committee upon the death of W. T. Brotherton Jr., who led the program for several years.

"Justice Brotherton was an inspiration to me and our students. He created the Model Supreme Court component of Youth in Government and always had time for students," Staton said. "Governor Underwood started the Student Legislature in 1952 during his first term as governor. He was another person who always took time for young people."

Staton was in Youth in Government as a member of the Mullens HI-Y.

"My experiences in HI-Y, Youth in Government and HI-Y summer camps at YMCA Camp Horseshoe are what led me into public service," he said. "My daughters have all participated, and my son will soon be involved. I want to see every school represented at Youth in Government."

Attorneys helping youth are an essential part of the Youth in Government process. Students need advice, guidance and often the basic information to serve as a student legislator, justice officer or lobbyist. They need to be encouraged, too. The teachers who assist students also need the expertise attorneys can provide. The help of so many local attorneys across West Virginia is essential for the program's success.

Attorneys Laurel Lackey Basil and Courtney Kirtley are two examples of Youth in Government volunteers. Both are graduates of Nicholas County High School, where they were active in HI-Y and participated in HI-Y Youth in Government and YMCA Camp Horseshoe. Today they are on the Youth in Government Committee and the Ohio-West Virginia YMCA Board. The Ohio-West Virginia YMCA is responsible for a wide range of HI-Y youth leadership programs.

Kirtley is now back in Summersville where she is law clerk for the Honorable Gary L. Johnson, Circuit Judge, 28th Judicial Circuit. In 2008, she served as president of the Young Lawyers Division of the West Virginia Bar Association. She helps with the local HI-Ys in Nicholas County and said she enjoys the opportunity to be involved with Youth in Government statewide.

"These programs benefited me so much," Kirtley said. "I want to see today's teenagers have these

Horseshoe, Model United Nations or the Youth and Government seminars."

Laurel Basil is now with Martin & Siebert in Martinsburg. She is helping the new Martinsburg HI-Y get started and said she wants to expand the HI-Y programs into the Eastern Panhandle. An active HI-Y supporter since her youth, Basil served as youth governor in 1998 and even met her husband, who participated in the Weirton HI-Y, at an HI-Y fall conference.

"All I can say is that every HI-Y program is good for teenagers, our schools and our communities," Basil said. "I want to see HI-Y in every community because HI-Y creates good citizens who know how to get things done and do it. Helping these programs is good for our youth, good for us as volunteers and good for West Virginia."

Staton said he invites attorneys to step forward to involve more students in Youth in Government and the other HI-Y programs. Attorneys can help students in writing legislation and in preparing cases for the Supreme Court.

"These are the kinds of experiences that motivate, challenge and prepare our teens to achieve their potential in their careers and as contributing citizens," Staton said.

To volunteer, e-mail the HI-Y Leadership Center at the Ohio-West Virginia YMCA at hi-y@hi-y.org. **WVU**

David King is the executive director of the Ohio-West