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Dad, your client's guilty

• Eight girls make rational, reasoned decision as jury in mock trial for Take Our Daughters To Work Day

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Twelve-year-old Kristen Hilkert loves her father, a lawyer with the Akron firm of Scanlon & Gearing. But that didn't stop Kristen from finding her father's client liable for \$100,000 in damages for running down a pedestrian.

The evidence that Kristen and seven other girls sitting in the jury box heard yesterday convinced them that the driver was at fault in the accident.

"She was drinking and underage," Kristen said.

Of course, the case wasn't real. The mock trial held yesterday in a Summit County Common Pleas courtroom was part of Take Our Daughters To Work Day.

Putting on a trial for the kids was the idea of Liz Bever, communications director for Scanlon & Gearing.

Bever suggested that a half-day educational program would be more valuable than the usual routine of having daughters shadow their parents as they went about their work.

"It was really neat to give them a better understanding of what their parents do," Bever said.

For the sake of realism, Bever arranged to use the courtroom of Judge Mary F. Spicer, who was on vacation.

The firm's lawyers and support

personnel played the roles of the participants in the mock trial. The case was a civil lawsuit filed by a pedestrian, supposedly struck by a car on High Street near the Polsky Building.

The "29 year old driver" admitted on the witness stand that she had two beers. But the victim conceded that she was jaywalking between parked cars.

"It was hard to tell what's the truth," said Bever's daughter, Amanda, 10. "But I liked deciding who was at fault."

Megan Turner, 15, daughter of Kris Turner, a legal secretary with the firm, said the jurors split on the first vote. Four thought the driver solely at fault. The other four felt the pedestrian bore at least some responsibility.

Further deliberation quickly yielded a unanimous compromise, Megan said, with 75 percent of the blame placed on the driver and the remainder on the pedestrian.

"The 25 percent was because she jaywalked," Kristen said.

The jurors decided a broken arm and leg and a concussion were worth \$100,000.

Kristen's father, Mark Hilkert, said the mock trial dramatically demonstrated how the legal system works.

"We're not trying necessarily to encourage them to be lawyers," he said. "We just wanted them to see

what we do."

The girls also learned what happens before a case ever gets to the courtroom.

In a morning session held at the firm's offices, Michael J. Del Medico, the attorney for the pedestrian plaintiff, and Pamela Beals, a paralegal who played the role of the victim, demonstrated "how he talks to a client for the first time," said Megan Turner. "Then we got information about what the paralegals and secretaries do."

"I thought it was very insightful."

Caitlin Del Medico, 9, agreed. "I learned that there was a lot going on behind the scenes."

Colleen Hart, daughter of lawyer Patrick J. Hart, who played the role of the judge, summed up the experience.

"It was different from TV — what you see on *L.A. Law*," she said. "We learned there was a lot more to it."

While all the girls thought the half-day spent with their parents was valuable, it didn't change their minds about career ambitions.

Colleen wants to be a veterinarian; Megan's goal is to teach physical education and coach basketball.

"I'd like to be a marine biologist," Amanda Bever said.

Her mother said there was some controversy when she proposed the idea.

"Someone in the office said, 'Isn't this discriminatory?'" she said. "Maybe next year we'll have Bring Our Children To Work Day."