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## Amicus Curious

### He'd like to give another family a role model

By Pat Milhizer  
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When Rory Dean Smith is on the road to recruit minority college students for The John Marshall Law School, he regularly hears questions about whether the school has a support system to help students through three years.

Smith is always ready to discuss the subject, and he will talk about the school's counseling programs and skills seminars.

But one of the best ways to show off the school to interested college students is the National Undergraduate Diversity Mock Trial Competition.

Smith founded and coordinates the event, which is in its sixth year and was held on Friday and Saturday. The competition featured 60 students from 20 schools, but it's not the typical mock trial event.

After the students arrive, they're split up and paired with students from other schools.

The idea is to make sure that every team has a mix of different ethnicities, much like the diversity Smith tries to bring to John Marshall.

"We need to, as a society, make sure that we've got students from all walks of life and have a hope that if they do study, that there will be something that comes from it — something good will happen," Smith said.

And in this competition, there's money on the line.

Members of the first-place team and the best overall advocate are eligible to receive \$5,000 per year toward tuition at John Marshall should they apply and be accepted.

John Marshall student Anthony Sam would know. In 2007, his team won, and he won the individual award. In addition to developing courtroom skills at the competition, as a double winner Sam will save \$30,000 on tuition over three years.

"Walking away with tuition waivers as an undergrad, it gives you a sense of security ... that you're not going to be \$150,000 in debt by the time you graduate," Sam said.

Meeting established attorneys who serve as mock trial judges doesn't hurt, either.

"They come up afterward and say 'If you're looking for a job, here's my card.' And I think that's awesome," Sam said.

Sam also has found a mentor in Smith.



Rory Dean Smith

Paul McGrath

Like Sam, Smith grew up on the city's South Side. Smith's father, Lawrence E. Smith Jr., graduated from John Marshall in 1948 after paying his way through school by working at a steel mill and sweeping floors in restaurants.

"He fought to stay awake in class," Smith said.

"But because of John Marshall Law School and Dean [Noble] Lee — who cared about my father as a student and looked out for him — my brother, my sister and I all became lawyers," Smith said. "So John Marshall Law School changed what was possible for us."

Smith, 51, earned a bachelor's degree, law degree and master's degree in business administration from Northwestern University. After passing the bar in 1983, he joined Continental Bank and worked there for five years, the first half in the law department and the

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second half as a real estate lending officer.

In 1988, he moved to the Prudential Insurance Co. to work as associate regional counsel.

While there, Smith helped the insurance firm establish a program to hire minority-owned law firms.

Smith joined his first law firm in 1995, working at Albert, Bates, Whitehead & McGaugh. He joined the firm as a partner, bringing Prudential along as a client.

In 1998, Smith was recruited to John Marshall to serve as associate dean for institutional research. Today, he is the associate dean for outreach and planning, and the director of diversity affairs and outreach programs.

Smith views his job as being one to help the effort to have the ethnic makeup of the legal profession mirror the country's population.

"It's critical for our country's sense of justice and jurisprudence that we don't allow ourselves to have a justice system which is out of balance with what our society looks like," Smith said. "If one segment has complete control — or a perceived complete control — over the justice system that's meted out in the criminal and civil courts ... there will be a potential for a lack of trust and support for that system.

"It's also related to our sense of fairness," he said. "Is the playing field level? Is there an opportunity for people of color to receive a fair trial, to be able to seek the justice system to adjudicate their transactional problems?"

"Sometimes we get that sense of fairness if it really is not just a jury of your peers but if it's also a judicial system that includes people that

look like you," Smith said. "And it doesn't require that it be 100 percent either way or the other, but just a sense that there's a proportional relationship."

But the effort is a challenge.

It doesn't help that national law school rankings are based in part on average student scores on the LSAT, which is a test on which minorities, on average, score lower than whites. Even though the test doesn't necessarily predict performance in law school, Smith said, the rankings do put pressure on law schools.

"It means law schools can't admit students that may have lower scores and still have that higher ranking where they want it to be, which helps attract other students and alumni dollars," Smith said.

About 28 percent of John Marshall's last entering class consisted of minorities. So what would Smith's father, who attended the school in the 1940s with a handful of other black students, think of that percentage?

"He'd be delighted but he'd want more," Smith said.

And much like his father's personal experience, Smith is trying to recruit students who may not have a lawyer in the family to emulate. John Marshall gave Smith and his siblings an attorney to look up to, he said.

"The opportunity that John Marshall gave my father opened up doors for us and gave us exposure that we wouldn't have had," Smith said. "That's what makes me excited to get up every morning — to know that I might be able to create that possibility for another family."