

Constitution taught in classrooms this month

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Attorneys will be bringing the constitution to life this month for local school children.

In honor of Constitution Day, September 17th, the American Constitution Society will be holding Constitution in the Classroom, an interactive lecture series in which lawyers visit schools to discuss the founding document and its relevance to modern society.

Constitution in the Classroom is the "signature public service" of the society, said Frank Housh, the society's only Buffalo-area member and an attorney with Cohen & Lombardo, P.C.

Constitution Day offers an excellent opportunity to engage students in discussions about how their daily lives are affected by the 200-year-old document, said Housh.

The program began in 2006 and has since expanded to 13 cities across the country, from Washington, D.C. to Boise, Idaho.

"We're very excited to be adding Buffalo to those ranks," said Jill Dash, the associate director for lawyer chapters with ACS.

During the event's first incarnation in Buffalo, at least five lawyers will be visiting local schools to explore the ramifications of Supreme Court case *Tinker v. Des Moines*.

"For obvious reasons, it's something kids can identify with," said Housh about the landmark case which determined whether students have the right to free speech in schools.

"The Supreme Court eventually held that children's First Amendment rights trumped the school rules," he said.

Alisa Lukasiewicz, an attorney with Phillips Lytle, will visit Bennett High School as part of the program.

"I am thrilled to have the opportunity to discuss a document that, as a lawyer, has very much defined my career," she said.

The curricula for the program was developed in conjunction with the Student Press Law Center. Lesson plans include three separate levels -- elementary, middle and high school - which build on students' current knowledge and understanding. With elementary students, "we work to make it a little more interactive," said Dash, with the discussion covering everything from whether students have the right to

"protest pizza in the cafeteria," to where these rights come from and how they came into play in *Tinker v. Des Moines*.

For older students, the lesson plan includes class debates and an analysis of related Supreme Court cases.

A similar program, headed by Michael Burger, is underway in Rochester.

While there is no official chapter of ACS in the Buffalo area, Housh is hopeful that one will be up-and-running in the near future. For now, he said, *Constitution in the Classroom* is "a way for local attorneys to be engaged in a wonderful program."

This year, ACS hopes to build on its previous success.

"We've gotten fantastic feedback from past efforts," said Dash.