

A JUDGE'S PERSPECTIVE *by Orlando Hodges*

I was approached to become a judge with the Michigan History Day (National History Day in Michigan) Districts 7, 8, and 10, in the mid- to late-1990s. Although I was Public Relations Director for the Troy Public Library, I was apprehensive that my background in marketing, sociology, and broadcast archival management wasn't adequate enough to "judge" an important event in the lives of youth and teens.



I was quickly informed that the students are the experts and we, as "judges," are just curious participants who simply guide them to present their information in whatever category they compete. We just ask questions for them to express themselves, thus they learn. So do we, in the process.

In my nearly 20 years of judging, I have seen entire families of siblings participate from the youth to senior divisions. I have judged former students who have graduated from college and are now teachers, librarians, doctors, engineers, and attorneys and married with children of their own. They are now graduates who share with their family the importance of Michigan History Day. In essence, the judges, students, and educators become a loose family of sorts.

Although there are people I see only at History Day, in between sessions or after the judging is complete, we share our lives and our judging competition stories. Michigan History Day provides participants with an opportunity to be a part of something larger than themselves. It is an opportunity to make history while discussing the concepts and events from the past. Serving as a judge, I witness as students gain confidence in reading, writing, and presentation development. The education students receive is tremendous and invaluable.

As a judge, it is I who have benefited from the students, their quest for knowledge, and their desire to infectiously share it. Michigan History Day is about learning and family. Soon after I started judging, I enticed my then fiancée, now wife, to judge with the rationale that she'd be volunteering with youth and getting a free lunch. Now, it is truly a family affair.