

Judges come a-courting

'Appeals on Wheels' case heard at Valpo school

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VALPARAISO | Rarely is the work of the Court of Appeals of Indiana punctuated by the "poink – poink – poink – poink" of the class bell over the PA system.

It was Friday, as the court heard oral arguments in a case during a session of its travelling "Appeals on Wheels" program at Valparaiso High School.

The program takes the work of the court on the road to colleges, high schools, civic groups, retirement communities and county courthouses around the state.

Hoosiers have a vague notion of how the state's judicial system works and the



Valparaiso High School junior Lena Hauter claps after judges for the Indiana Court of Appeals answered questions Friday after a court hearing in the Valparaiso High School auditorium. The "Appeals on Wheels" program bring the Court of Appeals of Indiana to local venues including 250 different places since 2000.

See **COURT** on Page A5

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A3

Court

program's goal is to help educate people on what courts do and how, said Judge Margret Robb, who presided Friday.

Judge Nancy Vaidik, a Porter County resident who serves on the court and who sat on Friday's bench, said the program gets judges into the community.

She, Robb and Judge Paul Mathias answered student questions after the hearing.

Senior Nathan Felton said he gained a reality check about the judicial system.

"It's not as efficient as it could be," said Felton, one of about 150 students who attended the hearing.

Felton, a member of the school's mock trial team, said he found it interesting to see the "drier" side of law as opposed to depictions in TV dramas. Friday's actual court proceedings allowed him to see "the real thought judges put into appeals," he said.

The question before Friday's court was whether an earlier trial court had abused its discretion when it revoked the probation of a man guilty of cocaine possession and ordered the man to serve the remainder of his sentence.

South Bend attorney Jeffrey Sanford, a Valparaiso University law school graduate, argued the man's otherwise good behavior during his probation was wrongly ignored by the trial court.

Angela Sanchez, the state's attorney, argued the seriousness of the probation violation – possessing a firearm – eclipsed the man's earlier behavior.

The judges will deliberate on the arguments and make their decision later.

The Court of Appeals has held over 250 on-the-road cases since 2000.

Valparaiso law firm Langer & Langer, which facilitated the court's visit, is offering a \$500 scholarship to a senior attending the session through an essay contest.