

Prominent lawyers recite 'famous cases'

By Bill Tyson

Philadelphia high school students got to hear firsthand what it's like to prosecute an organized crime boss or defend someone accused of multiple murders when five well-known city lawyers talked about the famous cases they've been involved in recently. The five lawyers' spoke to 200 students in City Hall's courtroom 653 as part of the Association's Law Day program on May 1.

Participants in the seminar entitled "Philadelphia Crime Stories- Famous Cases," were Assistant District Attorneys Rayford Means and Charles "Joey" Grant and defense lawyers Nino Tinari, A Charles Peruto Jr. and Sam Stretton. The defense lawyers spent much of the on-hour seminar explaining to the students why they represent defendants such as Lonnie Summers, Gary Heidnik and Judge Kenneth Harris.

Stretton, who defended Harris, said everywhere he goes people ask him the same questions "how can you defend those criminals?" "The defense bar is probably the most misunderstood segment of the bar." He said, "The criminal defense bar stands up for the Constitution. We make sure those charged with a crime get an adequate defense."

Stretton told the students that modern defense lawyers are following in the tradition of John Adams, who defended the British at the Boston Massacre even though it was against public opinion to do so. Tinari, who defended Lonnie Summers when he was tried and convicted of shooting Ralph Brooks, agreed with Stretton's assessment.

"What we do as defense lawyers is make sure that those who are accused of a crime are justly tried. " Tinari said. "We are the underdogs the moment we come into the courtroom defending someone accused of an atrocious crime" Peruto, who defended Gary Heidnick, said criminal defense cases often prived lawyers with a unique challenge. " I try auto accidents and personal injury