

Estrella Trial Advocacy Competitions

Mock court contest on federal civil law grows in fame nationwide,
Puerto Rico event considered best of its kind in its circuit

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The Estrella Trial Advocacy Competition (ETAC), Puerto Rico's first and only competitive "moot court" event on federal civil law, along with the Puerto Rico Trial Advocacy Competition, a mock trial contest on federal criminal law sponsored by Universidad Interamericana Law School and the local chapter of the Federal Bar Association, have been carving out a reputation for being the best in their circuit and well-respected among the best law schools in the U.S. Both competitions are held in San Juan, at the Nazario Clemente Federal Court Building in the Hato Rey district of San Juan, and the José V. Toledo U.S. Post Office & Courthouse in Old San Juan.



Alberto Estrella, managing member and majority shareholder of Estrella LLC Law Firm

Juan, also participates as an organizer.

"I've been told by the GW Law School faculty that one of the most satisfying news about ETAC is that in the moot court circuit, they've been commenting about how our [competition] has been the best of the year, and they have been telling me that since the first edition," the attorney said. "This year, among the participating law schools, we had two from the top-10 and five from the top-20 law schools in all the U.S. As a matter of fact, some of them, as soon [as] the competition was over, sent in their entry forms, with all their fees, before we could launch the call [for the next competition]."

Among the law schools that have participated in ETAC are Emory, Fordham, George Mason, Mercer Pace and William & Mary, as well as University of California at Berkeley and Los Angeles. Puerto Rico law schools, Estrella said, have been increasing their participation. "During the first year, only Universidad Interamericana (UI) came. At the second one, University of Puerto

Rico (UPR) joined. Next year, which will be ETAC's fourth edition, Pontificia Universidad Católica de P.R. will also be participating. UI and UPR performances have increased in quality, achieving good [scores] from judges. Language hasn't been a problem at all, and they have shown great ability competing."

ETAC offers law students an important learning experience in which they can practice advocacy skills. They prepare law students, where classrooms sometimes can't reach, and measure their ability in real time against their nationwide peers. Students have an opportunity to put into practice the rules of evidence, trial strategy and oral advocacy skills, including preparing lines of questioning, statements and arguments. Additionally, using real courtrooms gives students the unique experience of learning to use them well—the witness box, the jury box, and how to address the bench.

During recent editions, the attorney explained, Magistrate Judge Marcos López has been presiding over the finals. "It is not only because of his experience, but also because he has the ability to re-create all the drama of an actual trial. And the students get very impressed."

At GW, Estrella's alma mater, he said there was a similar moot court competition on civil law, but it ceased to exist, and the attorney proposed taking the event to Puerto Rico, to which they complied. At the mock trials, a team of students and members of the faculty draft the case. After two months of preparation, the various teams compete against each other as plaintiffs and defendants before three judges, one who presides while two others serve as the jury. "It is such a good tool for students to be creative and find the most effective strategies and angles, to know how to question, what to highlight and what not, to make a good case," the lawyer stated.

The next edition of the competition, Estrella said, will feature expert witnesses. ■



Attorney Alberto Estrella, managing member and majority shareholder of Estrella LLC Law Firm, one of the ETAC sponsors, along with George Washington University Law School (commonly known as GW Law School), told CARIBBEAN BUSINESS that because of the respectability achieved by the event, GW Law School recently also decided to name its intramural competition after the Estrella Trials, in which the Puerto Rican law firm, the oldest in Old San