

Teen-Agers Take Law into Own Hands



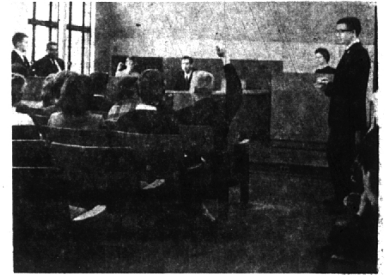
Court Is Now in Session

With the dignity and decorum of official judicial proceedings, Birmingham's Teen-Age Traffic Court officers (from right) Judge Pat Hall, Bailiff John Videgar and Recorder Lynn Roberts open another monthly session. The court, conducted by seniors of Seaholm High School's government classes, has been held each school year in the city commission chambers of the city hall since its establishment in 1957 by Lieutenant Robert Schaule of the Police Juvenile Division. "This is my pet project," says Schaule, who serves as director of the court. Designed to emphasize safety consciousness and good citizenship, the court, the first of its kind in Oakland County, tries traffic violators between the ages of 14 and 17 on a voluntary basis.



Offender Hears Charges and Enters Plea

The offender and one of his parents (in this case juror Doug McFarland (left) and Seaholm civics instructor Robert Richards, by the judge. The offender then enters his plea. If the offender is not satisfied with the disposition of the case, he may appeal the court's ruling to the Juvenile Court.



Jury Raises Questions

Once the offender's plea has been entered, whether guilty or innocent, members of the jury raise questions in order to determine the circumstances and extent of the offense. Here temporary jury foreman Bob Nadal (standing) opens the questioning. Twenty jurors and alternates are selected for each monthly session from Seaholm's 300 seniors in 12 government classes by lots while court officers, including the jury foreman, are chosen by civics instructor Robert Richards. Jurors carry out their duties with the fidelity of attorneys, probing into the slightest details of a case. If a juror feels his views may be prejudiced, he may be excused from jury duty. Between six and eight cases are handled during the Thursday morning sessions from 9 to noon.



Jury Deliberates

After all questions have been answered, the offender leaves the courtroom while the jury deliberates. During this period jurors talk among themselves, raising further questions for consideration and calling attention to various aspects of the testimony. Even the offender's attitude may influence the jury's decision on the type of penalty.

Teen-Age Traffic Court

Staff Photos
by
Marv Stasak



Hmmm, I Wonder?

A juror meditates while weighing the facts of the case in an effort to determine the penalty. If the offender is found guilty, a variety of penalties may be imposed including 500 to 5,000 word themes on different phases of traffic safety, suspended driver's licenses for from one to 29 days, attendance at driver's correctional clinic and talks with the traffic referee.



Jury Casts Vote

Temporary jury foreman Bob Nadal conducts a vote on the various penalties suggested during the discussion session. According to Lieutenant Schaule, the Teen-Age Traffic Court hasn't had a single plea of "not guilty" to the offense charged since the court's organization in 1957. However, the court dismissed a case for the first time last Thursday when the teen-age jurors decided that the offender did the only thing possible under the circumstances.



Foreman Reads Penalty

After the jury delivers its recommendation for dismissal or penalty to the judge, the offender returns to the courtroom for the official verdict. The jury foreman says "The jury has decided that the best corrective action in your case is . . ."



Offender Signs Out

The last stage of the case is the signing out of the offender with the court recorder after he has accepted the verdict of the jury. The court's ruling may be appealed in which event the case is taken to the Juvenile Court. The next session of the Teen-Age Traffic Court will be held at 9 a.m. on Feb. 9.