

The 10 Faces of OJEN

Norm Innocente



In August 2002, OJEN launched its flagship teachers training workshop, the Toronto Summer Law Institute. It was an event where high school teachers could meet justice professionals and legal academics to get first-hand perspectives into current legal issues. Norm Innocente, a Law teacher from Windsor, was among the first teachers to register. He has been back every year since!

Norm is one of those special teachers whose love of teaching has never dimmed and who just keeps getting better with time. He has spent the last 22 years teaching Law at F.J. Brennan Catholic High School and the last 25 years teaching an adult night school Law course at the Mason Centre in Windsor.

"I have a real passion for law", Norm admits, "I've loved every minute of it!"

Not only has Norm attended every one of OJEN's Summer Law Institute in Toronto for the past ten years, he has helped to organize similar institutes in Windsor. OJEN's Law Institutes for teachers have now been held in many communities across the province. With sessions ranging from Aboriginal Rights and Land Claim Disputes to International Criminal Law and from Restorative Justice to Refugee Law, teachers come away with fresh insights that enhance classroom teaching and learning.

"I never miss one," says Norm. "They really pump you up for the start of the school year".

Norm's enthusiasm for law inspired him to connect with the community, volunteering for organizations such as Crimestoppers and St. Leonard's House, a half-way house for adult offenders. The many contacts he made in the justice community all got invitations to come into his classroom and speak to his students about their areas of expertise.

Danielle McLaughin, Director of Education at the Canadian Civil Liberties Association remembers the first of her many visits to Norm's classroom. "Mr. Innocente first invited me to be a guest speaker in his law class at F.J. Brennan Catholic High School in Windsor nearly 10 years ago. I quickly learned that I was one of many people who represent a wide variety of faces of the Canadian Justice system to speak in Norm's classes".

"I've had well over 200 people come into my classroom ", Norm reminisces. "Defence lawyers, Crown attorneys, judges, politicians, forensics experts... even ex-convicts". His students have always been encouraged to ask questions and engage in dialogue with the speakers.

Norm advises new Law teachers to, "take advantage of all the resources you can get your hands on! You need all the help you can get!"

He himself has found much inspiration from OJEN's website, which contains more than 250 teaching resources and more added regularly.

"I use all of OJEN's resources; all the DVD's, all the literature, all the Landmark Cases... R. v. A.M., R. v Keegstra, R. v Brown...they're all really important in my Law classes," he says.

Not only has he used them in his lessons, Norm has worked with OJEN to review and edit new resources to insure they are age appropriate for high school students and relevant to the curriculum.

With his wealth of experience and vast collection of resources, Norm has always been very generous with other Law teachers and has mentored eight new teachers in the Windsor area. Having benefitted from a mentor himself in his early years, he understands the importance of sharing knowledge.

This month, after 37 years in the classroom, 34 of them teaching high school Law, Norm Innocente is retiring. He will be greatly missed! Although retiring from his job he's quick to say he isn't going anywhere and is excited about finding new ways to engage in the community.

"Don't worry," he says, "You'll see me at the Summer Law Institute again this year!"



Check www.ojen.ca for information about upcoming law institutes including this year's Toronto Summer Law Institute, taking place on August 28th and 29th.