

President's Column

Paul Beighle

One of AJA's long-range goals is to be an active, leading voice in the judiciary. I am extending an offer to each member to add his or her name to the list of judges who presently are participating — or would be willing to actively participate — in national events.

Since our annual meeting in Orlando in September, I have received many requests to appoint AJA members to participate in special projects or to serve on panels dealing with national issues. Some examples:

— September 11, 1998, a call from Kay Farley at the National Center for State Courts asking for candidates to sit on a judicial advisory committee on the issue of child support enforcement;

— October 1, 1998, a call from Frank Gavin at the Institute for Court Management looking for AJA representatives for a national planning committee on the future of judicial education and a joint planning group on trial court judicial leadership;

— October 21, 1998, a call from Tom Henderson at the NCSC for someone to serve on a committee working on issues about juveniles in adult courts. These are just a sample of the requests I have received and filled. I know President Strickland-Saffold received many similar requests, as did President Rosinek during his term and as will Judge Elliott when he becomes AJA president later this year.

The problem is not that AJA is being asked to do too much. Most of the members I have contacted for assignments have been willing, even eager to participate. The problem is in knowing where to turn within AJA for appropriate referrals. Just looking over a list of the AJA membership or hearkening back to what I personally know about individuals is a sketchy way of getting the right person to act for an express purpose. Doing an extensive, time-consuming inquiry among the membership would be too unwieldy and would not provide the necessary information in a short time, which is usually all one is given. What is needed is a directory.

We have a breakdown of the types of courts AJA members sit in — appellate, general jurisdiction, limited jurisdiction, arbitrator, federal and administrative — but we don't have a list of members who are available to participate in planning groups and committees. We also don't have the necessary information about each judge's special area of knowledge, practice, skill and interest. Having such a list would make it infinitely easier for me, and for future presidents, to identify the right AJA person to appoint to one of these positions.

I have asked the National Center to provide support for such a directory and Shelley Rockwell is looking into the logistics. In the meantime, I invite those AJA members who would like to sit on national committees, or participate in national planning groups, to send me their names, the names of their courts, the jurisdiction of their courts, the specific types of cases handled by their courts, their areas of specialization or personal interest, and their contact information. I will maintain this informal directory until we are able to construct a more permanent one. My address is on the inside cover of this publication. My fax number is (206) 615-0920; my e-mail address is paul.beighle@ci.Seattle.Wa.us.



Judge John Mutter will be making a similar announcement regarding a list of nominees for positions on the board of the National Center for State Courts. We should be able to consolidate the lists when they are compiled.

There has been further effort to implement the provisions of the AJA Long-Range Plan. The proposals contained in the plan were adopted as goals at the annual meeting in 1996. The organization needs, however, to make provisions for implementation of the six goals. The issue was raised at the final Board of Governors meeting in Orlando and the Executive Committee assumed the task.

In order to define the scope of the task and to assign responsibility for follow-up, the committee held a working retreat in October. Dr. Frank Gavin of the Institute for Court Management acted as the leader of the session and Dr. Tom Henderson of the National Center staff was on hand to assist. With their help, we spent the day devising a comprehensive plan of action and assigning tasks to committee members. The specific topics assigned for action were: improved meeting schedule; closer coordination of education activities; improvement of the web site; evaluation of the committee structure; closer liaison with the American Judges Foundation; development of improved methods to gain and retain membership; more effective public relations; greater utilization of the House of Delegates; and changes in the resolution process.

Progress on these tasks was the major topic of discussion at the Executive Committee meeting in January. The Executive Committee agrees that we are working toward the stated goals by involving the committees of the organization and by getting fresh ideas from other sources. We solicit the opinions and views of all AJA members in our work to become an even more effective judicial organization.