

President's Column

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In my last column, I wrote about requests for AJA members to participate on various national boards, study groups, panels and committees. I also mentioned the need for a registry of AJA members who are interested in taking an active role in these projects. By way of illustration, I will devote this column to describing some of those activities, the role that AJA members play in those activities, and the related benefits to our organization and the legal community.

Judge Shirley Strickland-Saffold was a member of the planning committee for the National Conference on Public Trust and Confidence in the justice system. This conference was jointly sponsored by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and the American Bar Association. Co-chairs of the planning committee were John J. Curtin, Jr. of the ABA and Chief Justice Thomas A. Zlaket of the Arizona Supreme Court. The conference was held in Washington, D.C. in May 1999, with the objective of institutionalizing the best ideas for nurturing public trust in the justice system in the years to come. At the conference, ideas were gathered from delegates from all of the participating states. In addition to Judge Strickland-Saffold's role on the planning committee, I am a member of the National Action Plan subcommittee, which will work toward implementation of the ideas that were developed at the conference.

Judge Gerald T. Elliott, president-elect of AJA, sits on the NCSC Research Advisory Council, which is responsible for consulting with and advising the Research Division of the National Center. The ten members of the council include representatives from the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ), the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) and the National Association for Court Management (NACM). This group meets twice a year for the purpose of determining what questions will be considered for research, the relevance of each research project to other projects, issues of funding and methods for disseminating the results.

Judge Elliott also has involved the AJA in the Physician Consortium on Substance Abuse Education program. This group consists of medical institutions that have gathered together to promote the education and training of members of the medical and judicial professions on the urgent issues of substance abuse. Through Judge Elliott's efforts, the AJA co-sponsored a prototype educational program at its mid-year meeting in Fort Worth in April; a follow-up program will take place at AJA's annual educational conference in Cleveland in October.

Judge Gayle Nachtigal represents the AJA on the Trial Court Judicial Leadership Program, along with participants from CCJ, COSCA, NACM, the ABA Judicial Division, the National

Conference of Metropolitan Courts, and the National Association of State Judicial Educators. The purpose of the committee is to develop a training model for presiding judges and trial court administrators or elected clerks to build effective leadership teams at the local trial court level. The committee will be assessing the needs of the program and advising on the curriculum for the project.

Judges Eileen Olds, Toni Higginbotham and John Mutter assisted the NCSC in preparing a response to a request for comments on legislation before the United States Congress. The bills on which AJA members were asked to comment and advise were the Adoption and Safe Families Act, and the Strengthening Abuse and Neglect Courts Act of 1998.

Judges Jay Dilworth, Eileen Olds, Bonnie Sudderth, Mike McAdam and Terry Elliott took part in a national conference on the Trial Court Performance Standards sponsored by the NCSC and the Bureau of Justice Assistance. After that conference, those judges and other AJA members developed a recommendation that led to the AJA's endorsement of the Trial Court Performance Standards at the September 1998 national meeting.

A commission of judges and court support personnel developed the Trial Court Performance Standards, which consist of twenty-two standards for trial court performance and substantive commentary on the rationale for each standard; they articulate the guiding principles by which trial courts fulfill their purposes and carry out their responsibilities. The ultimate aim of the standards — and AJA's endorsement of them — is to provide a systematic assessment of the trial court as an organization that serves a public need and to use the data to make courts as responsive and effective as possible.

In addition, Judge Leslie Johnson is representing the AJA on a committee sponsored by NCSC and the National Judicial College on the future of judicial education. Judges Jeffrey Rosinek and Terry Elliott are on the planning committee for Symposium 2000, being sponsored by NACM. Judge Thomas Clark will be attending the Physician Leadership on National Drug Policy Conference this June.

As you can see from this list, which is only representative, AJA members are deeply involved in national projects of great significance to the organization, the judiciary and the public. It is in order to expand that involvement and to have a broad base of representation from AJA that I have requested each of you to send me your name, the name of your court, the jurisdiction of your court, your areas of specialization and your areas of personal interest. The information will be used by me and by future AJA presidents to make appointments and assignments to such groups as I have listed here.

