

President's Column

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The following is an edited version of remarks given at the American Judges Association's Annual Educational Conference in Montreal on September 18, 2003.

I'm very honored and humbled to be your President. The American Judges Association is a special organization with special attributes that no other judicial organization possesses. We are uniquely an association **of** judges, run **by** judges, **for** judges. And, we are uniquely an **independent** association of **all** judges.

Every other judicial organization that I'm aware of has either a limited membership criterion (trial judges, Missouri judges, juvenile judges, federal judges, appellate judges, presiding judges, etc.) or it has an open membership but is controlled by someone else and is divided into impervious sections. These are all important and vital associations but not one of them does what the AJA does. We exist to serve **all** judges.

It doesn't matter whether your jurisdiction is limited or general, trial or appellate. It doesn't matter whether you are the chief justice of the supreme court of your state or a part-time municipal judge in a town of 2,000 people—in either case you are a judge and the AJA exists to help you become a better judge. The AJA treats you equally. It doesn't create sealed compartments, divisions, or sections. It is open to allow the free flow of ideas among all kinds of judges. This is a simple yet powerful organizing concept.

There are two people who particularly led me to become involved in the leadership of this association, AJA past president, Judge Terry Elliott, and the late Kansas Supreme Court Chief Justice, Richard Holmes, co-founder of the AJA. I particularly want you to remember Chief Justice Holmes, who began his judicial career as a municipal court judge. He was an honest, fair, intelligent, and straight-talking man. He was a dynamo of energy in a deceptively humble package. He was a true gentleman who had a tremendous influence on those he touched.

Judge Terry Elliott, also from Kansas, inspired me to pursue the course of leadership that I have chosen in the AJA by his example of hard work and dedication.

I had the privilege of working with both Chief Justice Holmes and Judge Elliott on the AJA's Long-Range Planning Committee in the late 1990s (commissioned by then-president John Mutter), along with other past and future presidents: Jerry Gertner, the late Bob Anderson, Leslie Johnson, Chris Williams, and Fran Halligan. One of the regular arguments we had in that committee can be summarized in a question:

Is the AJA a serious, important judicial organization or is it a fun-loving, social organization?

After all these years of going to AJA conferences and reading *Court Review* I'm prepared to answer that question tonight. The answer is . . . yes, both.

The AJA has for more than 40 years provided high-quality, low-cost, timely educational programs for judges covering a wide range of subjects of interest to a national judicial audience. Because our members serve on all levels of the state and federal judiciary, we have, necessarily, provided a broad selection of judicial educational. This must be the ongoing mission of the AJA.

If we were to not offer such programs at our annual conferences, very few judges would attend. If we didn't publish articles of high quality in *Court Review*, very few judges would remain members of AJA. Thus, it's important that we pursue this worthy goal by continuing to offer first-rate education at our conferences and by publishing articles of substance in *Court Review*. If we want the AJA to be the voice of the judiciary, we must continue these worthy pursuits.

The AJA has provided something else for over 40 years at our annual and midyear meetings: friendship. Perhaps, regarded by some as an unimportant goal of such meetings, to me it is the social contact and camaraderie that marks an AJA gathering. It's what I look forward to the most when I plan to attend an AJA event and I don't think my experience is unique. This camaraderie is a bond that holds the AJA together and is therefore something to be encouraged and continued.

During the next year we will continue to pursue both goals. We will have a strong educational program at our annual conference in San Francisco in October 2004 with an emphasis on the critical topic of judicial independence. Before that, we will have a unique midyear meeting this winter in Savannah, Georgia, sharing ideas and fun with our colleagues from the National Association for Court Management.

During the next year, we will strengthen our important relationship with the National Center for State Courts when the AJA's Executive Committee meets in Williamsburg, Virginia, and sees the National Center firsthand (for some committee members for the first time). At that meeting, the Executive Committee will look to the future of the AJA and discuss the important issues facing it. And through it all we will continue to make new friends, renew old acquaintances, and have a great time. It promises to be an important and fun year ahead for the AJA.

