

## AJA President's Update

My dear colleagues, thank you so much for the honor of becoming the current person in our distinguished line of American Judges Association presidents. I am now about seven weeks into my term, and think my husband is finally getting adjusted to being required to stand when I enter the room and always address me as Madame President. (Oh, how I wish!)

The purpose of this update is to let you know what I am doing as your President, and I will be trying to get it out to you every 6 weeks or so. I think we all enjoyed Brian MacKenzie's Rundown when he was President, and although I am more boring, hence the more boring title, the goal of keeping you in the loop seems very worthwhile.

The first thing I want to tell you about, just in case you were unable to attend, is our recent annual conference in Cleveland. That was one great event from beginning to end, and I have to give a huge shout out to our local Ohio members who organized it, our host with the most, Judge Michael Cicconetti, and our two Education Committee chairs, Judge Eugene Lucci and Judge Gayle Williams-Byers. (As always, Shelley Rockwell proved how apt her last name is by being the rock on which everyone relied in doing this organizing. She always deserves a standing ovation.)

The educational program in Cleveland began with inspiring addresses by Ohio Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor and Ohio Congresswoman Marcia Fudge. Judge Cicconetti also landed U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown as our (excellent) American Judges Foundation luncheon speaker. Highlights of the educational program included Dean Erwin Chemerinsky's fabulous constitutional-law update, plenaries on cutting-edge issues such as judicial independence and addressing unfair fines and fees, and a spellbinding plenary about two Native Americans by the outstanding author who wrote books about each of them, Joe Starita. Top-notch choice

sessions addressed topics like how self-help centers can improve court litigation, new approaches to court technology, dealing with jury bias, an elder law and guardianship update, approaches to wrongful-death lawsuits in police-shooting cases, ways to provide procedural and pretrial justice in adult and juvenile court, tips on high-profile cases, and ways to handle life beyond the bench. Family members joined us at Mr. Starita's plenary, and attended an excellent presentation on the Judicial Family Network program.

Our AJA awards recipients were particularly awe inspiring this year, and your upcoming issue of *Court Review* will include information on who they are and what awards they received. I want to highlight the judicial courage award, named after our own brave Harold Froehlich. This year's recipient was Gonzalo P. Curiel, the federal judge who persevered with dignity in presiding over the Trump University lawsuit despite then-candidate Donald Trump's attacks based on the judge's Latino heritage. Do read his eloquent letter of thanks, reprinted in the upcoming edition of *Court Review*.

The social events in Cleveland were marvelous, thanks again to our Ohio organizers. Conference attendees attended a sold out baseball game—the 19th win in the Cleveland Indians' historic 22- game win streak!—between Cleveland and the Detroit Tigers, toured local landmarks like the Terminal Tower and the Cleveland Trust Building, enjoyed the AJF reception at the historic Cuyahoga County Courthouse, visited Little Italy, went to the Cleveland Art Museum and dined at the top-rated restaurant there, and made group visits on successive days to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Our waistlines all appreciated Cleveland's other fine restaurants too.

A couple more significant things happened in Cleveland that I want to share with you. First, our former Presidents got together and reached consensus, which they shared with me, about the need to make sure that AJA is delivering value and service to our members who cannot always get to conference. I think there is a way of doing that: through the talent and

hard work in our committee membership. I strongly encouraged everyone at conference to sign up for the committees that interested them, and we got a very healthy response. Yesterday I finally finished the emails that appointed everyone to their committees. I am asking each committee to focus this year on one or two goals that will serve our many members we do not always see at conference. If you are one of those people, weren't able to be in Cleveland, and this topic interests you, please email me or Shelley to join one of our committees and jump on in!

A second significant event in Cleveland is that we had a very thought provoking presentation on "beginning the conversation" about diversity, especially race, from a panel of judges, prosecutors, and police officers who have been going into their local community to do just that. Inspired by that presentation, Judge John Conery suggested at our Board of Governors meeting that we "begin the conversation" as well. A really excellent and honest discussion ensued. One lesson I took from that discussion is that to me, it is becoming increasingly clear that as AJA moves forward, we must form strong alliances with other national court-oriented associations, including the national associations of lawyers that include divisions for judges from minority backgrounds. I have asked my excellent Executive Committee (EC) members to reach out and help us make those approaches. I want to find new ways to cooperate with other national organizations, including considering some co-location of our events and conferences, and perhaps some reciprocal membership benefits.

Another result of our Board of Governors discussion about diversity and race was that we have now formed a very productive alliance with President Benes Aldana of the National Judicial College, who was there for the BOG meeting. He and I had a wonderful follow-up meeting by telephone yesterday. We have some exciting plans in the works to bring AJA and the NJC closer, and one of them is available as of right now. NJC is providing \$500 scholarships to 10 separate AJA members, first come first served, to attend NJC courses. Let

us know if you are interested in one of those. I will be talking to EC soon about whether we can match funds for additional scholarships.

Speaking of things I and others have been doing since the Cleveland conference, I want to say thanks here to Justice Russell Otter who “relaxed” after his grueling year being AJA President by filling in for me as our AJA representative to the Canadian Association of Provincial Court Judges (CAPCJ) fall conference in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. I also want to thank Judge Brian MacKenzie, who is going to represent AJA for me at the National Association of State Judicial Educators (NASJE) conference, rescheduled due to Irma from September to early December 2017, in Charleston, South Carolina.

I promise I am soon to get off my duff and go represent you myself at a few events. First stop will be in a couple of weeks in Washington D.C. for the annual Rehnquist awards at the U.S. Supreme Court. I am staying in the historic Willard hotel, and expect to be bedazzled by all the grandeur. Then, at the end of November, I will be at the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) midyear conference in New Orleans. Among the interesting topics on the agenda there are best practices for addressing “disrupting factors” facing courts such as demands for access to court records/data, budget cuts, staffing and personnel challenges, judicial officer turnover, emerging technologies, substance abuse, and mental illness. Another fascinating agenda item is that COSCA will be piloting a judicial leadership curriculum.

EC will meet in NAPA this year, assuming the fires do not return and destroy our hotel venue. (They did take out an alternate place we had considered . . .) We are honor bound to support the wineries that survived, don't you think? But we'll also be zeroing in on some of the topics I mentioned above. Let me know if there is more you think we should take up.

Before I close for now, let me remind you there is plenty planned for AJA for the coming year. Our mid-year conference will be in Memphis, Tennessee, famous as a birthplace of rock

'n' roll and home of the blues, renowned for its barbecue, and the site of the National Civil Rights Museum, Beale Street, the Memphis Rock and Soul Museum, and Graceland. Our venue is on the grounds of Graceland and our Judge Betty Moore and Justice Robert Torres are planning a fantastic education program, as well as events that let you taste the BBQ, hear the music, and learn about the civil-rights history. Sign up soon!

We have a great program set for Kauai in September 2018 already. Judge Catherine Carlson and Justice Torres have practically the entire education program planned already, and what could be a more wonderful venue than this beautiful Hawaiian garden island?

We are also very excited about our venue for spring 2019, the stunning city of Savannah. And reminder: in September 2019, when we will be at the beautiful downtown Drake Hotel in Chicago, partnering with the Illinois state courts. Mark your calendars now! And think about how we can join with the courts in your area for other future conferences, because the earlier we plan joint events, the better and more successful they are, and the more new blood flows into our membership.

One last time, let me make that committee pitch to you. I think AJA really needs rededication to our committees and, through those, to serving our members who do not come to conference. You are one of our incredibly talented members, and we need you to find the AJA committee that matters to you, so that AJA can take your input and turn it into outstanding articles in *Court Review*, premier resources on our website, superb presentations at conference, and, in general, great guidance to the rest of us on being better judges. If you haven't filled out your committee preference form already, do it now and ship it to Shelley Rockwell (srockwell@ncsc.org)! We need you and your knowledge, passion, and engagement.

You'll be hearing from me again around mid-December. Until then, have a safe and happy Halloween, a meaningful Veteran's Day, and a wonderful Thanksgiving.