

AJA Benchmark

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The Legislative Plaza in Nashville, Tennessee--the host of AJA's 2012 midyear meeting.

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A Message from the President

Can a group of a couple thousand judges develop a sense of community? That is the singular challenge facing the American Judges Association. I believe that the answer is yes. I don't think it will be easy, but a strong sense of community among the AJA membership is the surest path toward making this an organization to which judges want to belong. I ask you to join with me in a concerted effort to build a sense of judicial community within the American Judges Association.



The American Judges Association is over 50 years old. But we know that age alone is not a prognosticator for future success. During the last decade we have seen venerable law firms with historic pasts disintegrate. We live in a new era and, as a result, AJA needs to adapt to our times.

There may be few jobs that are more personally rewarding than being a judge. If there are better jobs than what we have, surely none of those jobs are in the law. We get to make important decisions that affect our community and individual lives. It is not trite to say we make democracy not a term, but a reality. However, as good as the job of being a judge is, these are not always the easiest of times in which to serve. Frayed budgets have impacted the morale of court employees and judges. The political rhetoric of our times has made being a judge an all-too-convenient target for political cheap shots. We therefore need to build a sense of community--that we are all in this together to ease the pain of some of those challenges.

AJA's strength has been great educational conferences and an outstanding publication in *Court Review*. Both are bedrocks of the organization. We are a unique judicial organization because of our Canadian judicial membership. Although most of our members, at best, will just occasionally see each other in person, that alone is not a fatal impediment toward building a sense of community. We have now started a blog: <http://blog.amjudges.org/>. The blog is an experiment. It might not work. But if a start is a predictor of future success, we might have something that will benefit all of us. The blog gives us an easy way to share ideas, frustrations, and things of interest. I encourage you to contribute to it. I emphatically encourage you to let other judges who are not currently members of AJA know about it, look at it, and occasionally

contribute an item of interest.

We have a list serve that allows us to communicate by e-mail with our membership. Although the last thing any of us needs is a steady stream of e-mails we don't have time to read, the list serve is a tool that judges can use to get advice or start a discussion. A year ago the ABA judicial division had a rather effective (and short) series of e-mails on how judges can deal with jurors who use social media during deliberations. There is no reason that AJA cannot provide that same kind of support for our membership. We need to "judiciously" increase the use of the list serve.

Finally, there is the question of leadership of AJA. It is a great honor to be selected as president, but it is even more important to me that when I am done, each of us can say AJA is a stronger organization. No one person can do that. I need your help. Contribute to the blog, call me (612-348-4389), or send me an e-mail. Together we can and will build a sense of community within AJA.

Kevin Burke

AJA Elects New Officers

Judge Kevin Burke became *president* of AJA at the recent annual conference in San Diego. He serves on the District Court in Hennepin County, Minnesota. The other officers elected were:

- Toni M. Higginbotham, First Circuit Court of Appeal, Louisiana, *president-elect*
- Elliott Zide, Massachusetts Trial Court, *vice president*
- Brian W. MacKenzie, 52nd Judicial District Court, Michigan, *secretary*
- Harold V. Froehlich, Circuit Court (ret.), Wisconsin, *treasurer*

Mary Celeste of the Denver County Court became AJA's *immediate past president*.

AJA Presents 2011 Awards

AJA presented a number of awards at the 2011 Awards Luncheon in San Diego. Justice William Ray Price, Jr., of the Missouri Supreme Court received the *Chief Justice Richard W. Holmes Award of Merit*, presented to a judge for outstanding contributions to the judiciary, for his work promoting problem-solving courts. The *Judge William H. Burnett Award*, which recognizes an AJA member for outstanding service to the association, was given to Mary Celeste. Congressman Steven C. LaTourette received the *Glenn R. Winters Award*, which is given to a layperson who has made a substantial contribution toward improving the judiciary, and the *Judge Bob Jones Memorial Award* was presented to Steve Leben to recognize significant contributions to judicial education by a member of AJA.

AJA also presented its 2011 *American Gavel Award for Distinguished Reporting about the Judiciary*. The award is given to a regional and a national member of the legal journalism community and highlights the importance of journalism in educating the public about the legal system and the fundamental principles and values upon which that system is based. This year's regional award was presented to Jim Schaefer of the *Detroit Free Press* for his series of articles on court-ordered restitution moneys and how some courts ordered restitution, which the county collected but did not give to the victims. Jan Crawford, CBS News's chief legal correspondent, received the national award. Crawford is a recognized authority on the U.S. Supreme Court, whose book *Supreme Conflict: The Inside Story of the Struggle for the Control of the United States Supreme Court* (2007) gained critical acclaim. She began covering the Court in 1994 and worked for ABC News and PBS before moving to CBS in 2009.

Music City to Host AJA's 2012 Midyear Meeting

Mark your calendars now for the AJA [2012 Midyear Meeting](#), to be held May 17-19 at the Doubletree Hotel Downtown in Nashville, Tennessee. The room rate is only \$129/night plus tax, and the meeting will feature an all-day Symposium on Friday, May 18, on the topic of judicial selection and retention. More information will follow in the next issue of *Benchmark*.

News from the National Center for State Courts

Census on Problem Solving Courts

The National Center for State Courts is conducting the first census of its kind of America's problem-solving courts. To do so, NCSC is asking the court community's help to ensure that all courts and programs that focus on the underlying chronic behaviors of those appearing before the court are represented. The census, which will be launched early in 2012, will compile data that will identify not only the key components of problem-solving courts, but also their abilities to collect and report data. "The census will benefit the courts in several ways, including serving as an indicator for determining the need for additional funding," said Nicole Waters, senior court research associate and director of the census project. Any courts or programs that want to be included in the census should e-mail their contact information to censuspsc@ncsc.org by November.

Florida Judge to Provide Keynote Address at CTC 2011

Judge Steven Leifman (Miami-Dade County, Florida) will discuss "Ending the Revolving Door of Justice: How Technology Helped One Judge Reengineer His Court" at the October 5 keynote address at the NCSC's 2011 National Conference on Court Technology ([CTC 2011](#)) in Long Beach, California.

The judge will discuss how a team representing every aspect of the Florida justice system, including prisons and the state legislature, worked together to solve the problem of mentally ill defendants constantly cycling through the courts without getting the services they needed. The results include a restructured justice system, a drastically reduced jail population, and savings for taxpayers.

CTC is held every two years and is the worlds' largest conference dedicated to court technology.



AJA Invites you to our 2012 annual conference in New Orleans.

AJA Future Conferences

2012 Midyear Meeting: Doubletree Hotel, Nashville, Tennessee, May 17-19
\$129 single/double

2012 Annual Conference: Sheraton New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana, September 30-October 5
\$169 single or double

2013 Annual Conference: The Fairmont Orchid, Kohala Coast, Hawaii, September 22-27
\$219 single/double

American Judges Association

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