

AJA Benchmark

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New AJA president James McKay with some of AJA's past presidents at the annual conference (l to r): Chris Williams, Mike Cicconetti, Eileen Olds, Gayle Nachtigal, Steve Leben, Tam Nomoto Schumann, Mike McAdam, and Tom Clark.

President's Message

Judge James McKay



It is only fitting that in the 50th year of our existence that we make a statement to the whole world that we are truly in the electronic age. This edition of the *Benchmark* will be the first time online for our AJA publication. Our general membership at our annual meeting in Las Vegas supported this concept wholeheartedly, especially when they realized the savings to our association in these troubled economic times.

Las Vegas proved to be very fruitful. We had an excellent and well-attended education program presented by our chairman, Judge Elliot Zide. The festivities opening our 49th seminar were conducted by Las Vegas's colorful mayor, Oscar Goodman. Special thanks go to AJA past president Mike Cicconetti, who did a great deal of preparatory work in helping us set up the convention.

In spite of the dismal economic times, this year we raised more money for our American Judges Foundation than ever before with a cocktail party at the home of Craig Kenny, a prominent lawyer in the Las Vegas area. Making this occasion sparkle even more was the appearance of Judge Lynn Toler, who came to socialize and share some stories with the rest of us concerning her "television jurisdiction." Everything was capped off with a fabulous banquet at the Golden Nugget. We were entertained by the famous "Rat Pack" act, which is not to be missed on your return trip to Las Vegas if you did not get to see them that evening.

This next year may prove to be very challenging with regards to our organization's finances and membership. There are also legal issues involving the judiciary, which may face us this coming year. One of them is a recent decision in *Caperton v. A.T. Massey Coal Co.*, which could very well impact the selection of judges in the future. I am sure we will be talking about this case and others in our upcoming conferences.

We are looking forward to our Midyear Meeting in Tucson, Arizona, May 20-22, 2010. If I don't get to see you there, I hope to see all at our Denver, Colorado meeting, October 3-8, 2010.



AJA Governor Leon Ruben hangs out with the "Rat Pack" at the annual conference in Las Vegas.

AJA Elects New Officers/Committees for 2009-10

AJA installed new officers at the annual conference in Las Vegas. James F. McKay III was installed at the inaugural banquet on September 17, 2009, as AJA's 48th president. Officers for 2009-10 are:

President: James F. McKay III, Louisiana 4th Circuit Court of Appeals

President-elect: Mary Celeste, Denver County Court

Vice President: Kevin Burke, Hennepin County (Minnesota) District Court

Secretary: Toni M. Higginbotham, The Family Court of East Baton Rouge (Louisiana)

Treasurer: Harold Froehlich, Outagamie (Wisconsin) Circuit Court

Immediate Past President: Tam Nomoto Schumann, Orange County (California) Superior Court

Judges Mike Cicconetti (Ohio), Libby Hines (Michigan), Leon Ruben (Tennessee), and Elliott Zide (Massachusetts) were elected to the AJA Executive Committee.

New Committee Seeks Members' Input

The Legislation and Elections Committee is looking for articles, case law, statutes, personal experiences, or other information to assist other members on legislation and election topics. This will enable AJA to develop a library of information that can serve as a valuable resource to judges who are up for election or who encounter situations involving these issues. Since this is a fairly new committee, please provide any suggestions you may have to help the committee serve its members.

You can find the list of members of AJA's other standing and ad hoc committees [here](#).

AJA Plans 2010 Meetings--Save the Dates!

In these difficult economic times it is even more important for AJA members to come together to share solutions and ideas to find new ways to provide efficient, accessible justice. There is no better place to do this than at an AJA meeting. Mark your calendars now for the 2010 Midyear Meeting, to be held May 20-22 at the breathtaking [Loews Ventana Canyon Resort](#) in Tucson, Arizona. In addition to regular business meetings there will be an important education session on "Access to Justice: The Need for Creativity in Tough Financial Times."

The AJA 2010 Annual Educational Conference will be held October 3-8 in Denver at the Westin Tabor Center. This will be a joint conference with Colorado judges and will feature a session by the National Holocaust Museum on lessons learned from government control of the courts in Nazi Germany, as well as sessions on sentencing, court security, recent decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court, and other vital topics with a focus on how the courts can do more with fewer resources.

Complete information on the midyear meeting will be available on the AJA Web site in January; information on the annual conference should be in the mail to all members by May and also will be available on the Web site. Please contact aja@ncsc.dni.us if you have questions.

AJA Members in the News

Judge Gregory A. Adams Honored in 2009

DeKalb County Superior Court judge Gregory A. Adams was presented with the 2009 Distinguished Jurist Award at the annual State Bar of Georgia Meeting by the Gate City Bar Association Judicial Section. Judge Adams received the award for his many contributions to the Georgia Justice System and the greater DeKalb County community during his 15 years of judicial service.



Judge Adams received the 2009 Georgia State University Alumni Association Distinguished Alumni Community Service Award at the Georgia Dome on May. This award is presented annually to a Georgia State graduate in recognition of outstanding and significant contributions to the community on a volunteer basis or through professional involvement. The alumni association donates \$2,500 to the charity of the honoree's choice.

The NAACP also honored Judge Adams with the 2009 Thurgood Marshall Award at their 53rd annual Freedom Funds Award Banquet. This award recognizes his many contributions toward the advancement of civil liberties within the Georgia Justice System and the greater DeKalb community.

In Memoriam

The Honorable Gus Cifelli

The American Judges Association expresses condolences to the family of retired Michigan judge Gus Cifelli, who died on March 26, 2009. Judge Cifelli served on Michigan's 48th District Court (Bloomfield Hills) from 1973 to 1999 and was a member of AJA's Board of Governors.

Besides a long and distinguished career on the bench, Gus Cifelli enjoyed a successful career on the gridiron. After serving the U.S. Navy in World War II, he was a starting tackle for the University of Notre Dame football team, which won three national championships. After graduating with honors and a degree in philosophy (cum laude), he was drafted by the Detroit Lions in 1950, which won the national championship in 1952. He also played for the Green Bay Packers, the Philadelphia Eagles, and the Pittsburgh Steelers before returning to Notre Dame as an assistant football coach and earning his J.D. from Detroit Law School in 1965.

AJA Member Recognized by Cambridge Who's Who

Charles B. Stratford, who retired from as a Los Angeles Superior Court judicial referee on July 7, 1997, has been recognized by Cambridge Who's Who for dedication, excellence, and leadership in all aspects of law. He has spent more than 35 years in the criminal justice field and holds a Master's of Public Administration from the University of Southern California and a Bachelor of Arts in Criminology from the University of Dayton.

Judge John Guidry Joins Louisiana Judicial Council

The Conference of Court of Appeal Judges has appointed Judge John Michael Guidry as their representative on the Louisiana Judicial Council. The council often serves as the research arm of the Louisiana Supreme Court and acts as a resource center for improving the operations of the court system. Judge Guidry has served on the First Circuit Court of Appeal since 1997, and he holds a degree from the Southern University Law Center.

NCSC Honors Past AJA President

Judge Gayle Nachtigal (Circuit Court of Washington County, Oregon) was inducted in the National Center for State Courts' Warren E. Burger Society at NCSC's Annual Recognition Luncheon in Washington, D.C., on November 20, 2009. The society honors those who have volunteered their time, talent, and support to NCSC in exceptional ways. Gayle served on the NCSC Board of Directors from 1999-2005.

New Resources from NCSC

"Economy and the Courts" Main Topic of New *Future Trends*, E-Newsletters

NCSC has published [*Future Trends in State Courts 2009*](#), the 21st edition of its "Report on Trends in State Courts" series. Articles discuss "How Courts Are Weathering the Economic Storm"; how budget cuts affect not only those who work in the courts but also those who use services the courts provide; the importance of strategic planning during "tough times"; and how courts are seizing the opportunity to improve their operations and provide essential services while remaining fiscally solvent. Other topics include improving courts through "green" technology, the possible future of drug courts, and performance evaluation. For more information about *Future Trends*, contact NCSC's Knowledge and Information Services at (800) 616-6164.

Two NCSC e-newsletters also provide courts with crucial information for economic hard times. [*State Courts and the Economy*](#) reports the latest news about how the current economic downturn is affecting court operations--and what courts are doing to respond. The [*Federal Funding Report*](#) provides tips and strategies for winning grants from public and private sources.

NCSC Publishes Latest Edition of Graphic-Novel Series

[*Justice Case Files*](#) is a series of illustrated novels created by NCSC to educate the public about how our courts work, how judges make decisions, and how courts are accountable to the law. The newest issue in the series, *Justice Case Files 3: The Case of Jury Duty*, follows an 18-year-old called for jury service for a trial about underage drinking and driving. The story lines and content for the series were developed by judges and other legal professionals, and the books were illustrated and published by Layne Morgan Media, a graphic-novel company headquartered in Springfield, Missouri. Lesson plans have also been developed for teachers and courts. For more information, or to order, please contact Lorri Montgomery at NCSC at (757) 259-1525 or lmontgomery@ncsc.org.



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Photo by Fred Hood © Metropolitan Tucson Convention & Visitors Bureau

AJA will be in Tucson for its 2010 Midyear Meeting.

AJA Future Conferences

2010 Midyear Meeting: Loews Ventana Canyon Resort, Tucson, Arizona, May 20-22
\$189 single/double

2010 Annual Conference: Westin Tabor Center, Denver, Colorado, October 3-8
\$205 single/double

2011 Midyear Meeting: Westin Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, April 14-16
\$209 single/double

2011 Annual Conference: Westin Gaslamp, San Diego, California, September 11-16
\$249 single/double

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

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