

With Vision We Move Forward

Steve Leben, AJA Vice President

I don't claim to be familiar with the entire history of the American Judges Association. Not only was I absent when it was founded in 1959, I was only three years old. So I do not intend by these comments to overlook the many important contributions that have been made to this organization over the years by so many people.

What I do want to do, though, is to single out two of our recent leaders for praise and to comment about some of the significant things they have helped us to achieve. These things were achieved because each of them had a vision for the AJA in which we could do things beyond what we had done before.

Gerald (Terry) Elliott served as AJA's president in 1999-2000. He has continued to serve the association in a number of roles since then, including a term just concluded as chair of our Education Committee. Terry saw a need for education tailored for judges on substance abuse issues. He organized an excellent half-day educational program on the topic that was presented at an AJA conference and sought a grant from the State Justice Institute (SJI) to make an educational program on the topic widely available.

SJI approved the grant and ultimately allocated about \$160,000 toward the initial grant and a continuation project. With staff assistance from the National Center for State Courts, a model presentation was developed. Detailed materials were prepared and are now available in court libraries throughout the United States. Educators in several states have been trained to use the materials. And the program will be available in early 2005 in an online, e-education format.

Mike McAdam served as AJA's president in 2003-2004. He decided in early 2003 that he wanted to focus on judicial independence concerns, particularly at the trial-court level. Perhaps emboldened by the SJI grant AJA had received, he looked for outside funding to expand what could be accomplished in such a program. The result was a \$100,000 grant from the Joyce Foundation and a conference of substance and interest on judicial independence. Those of you who attended the conference know it was a tremendous program; those who didn't have the chance to follow along

through two issues of *Court Review*: a pre-conference issue with papers from program presenters and a post-conference issue that will provide edited transcripts of the program.

But Mike's efforts didn't stop with the program itself. He had a greater vision, which was realized when film crews from the syndicated Public Broadcasting System program *Inside the Law* agreed to use the conference as the primary component for a one-hour television program. AJA officers and program presenters participated in a one-hour taped discussion at the San Francisco conference, moderated by Jack Ford. Edited portions of that discussion, along with additional interviews, will become a one-hour program on judicial independence that will be on PBS stations sometime in 2005.

Two key ingredients have been a part of the leadership style of Terry Elliott and Mike McAdam. First, they had a vision for AJA that was bigger than the present, one that could move us to new accomplishments and additional service to our members and the public. Second, they involved others in their projects so that the projects could not only accomplish more through the group than through a few individuals, but also continue over time. For the substance abuse education program, Bill Schma has chaired an advisory committee for the project for the past several years, and Paul Beighle, Peggy Hora, Tom Merrigan, and Jeff Rosinek have served on that group as well. For the judicial independence project, McAdam got all of the other AJA officers involved, as well Mike Manners, all of the attendees at the San Francisco conference, and the membership in general.

This year's AJA president, Gayle Nachtigal, also has a vision. She will seek to develop the AJA's role as "the voice of the judiciary." With the base provided by our past leaders, I know that she—and the association—will have a successful year. bm

