

Reflections . . .

Eileen A. Olds, District Court Judge, Virginia, and AJA Secretary

On Judicial Security

Just after I had signed onto my computer to prepare the minutes of our recent midyear meeting, I was reminded again of how security concerns continue to plague judges and justices across this country. *"You are a lousy judge, and you should be removed from the bench"* appeared as an instant message on my computer monitor from someone screen-named "Sinkiss." All kinds of thoughts crossed my mind: Isn't it 8:56 p.m. on a Thursday night? Am I not signed onto my *home* personal computer? Why is there a litigant even thinking about me at this hour? Isn't it a shame that personal information regarding judges is up for grabs to almost anyone without permission or scrutiny?

When individuals began prying into information that is not generally for public dissemination, or that we have not made available to them, it raises suspicion and should not be ignored. Until now, "Sinkiss" had never contacted me personally. I have known of his existence for approximately two months, as he maintains a "Blogspot" (a personal diary that he chronicles on the Internet) titled "My Fight in Family Court Chesapeake Virginia" dedicated to describing his experiences within the court system. He does not know that I am aware of this.

Had this been in years past, I may not have given it much thought. Incidents such as the recent Atlanta courthouse murders and the Chicago federal judge's slain family, however, remind me that what at first glance may look like an innocent or curious act can actually end with tragic results. I am concerned about these types of encroachments into our personal lives. We all should be. We should not have to juggle safety concerns and bear the awesome responsibilities and duties of our positions while at work, in addition to dodging threats to our personal safety in our homes. That is why the AJA president Gayle Nachtigal should be applauded for publicly responding immediately after those recent horrifying events. She should also be commended for actively participating in the National Center for State Courts' summit on court security held thereafter. It is not just within the confines of our courtrooms that we must be vigilant with security issues. That, and other issues confronting the judiciary, is also why our coming together for AJA annual and midyear meetings has taken on greater significance. It is important now more than ever that judges have a forum for addressing concerns that are distinctive to them. The American Judges Association is no longer just an organization that caters to

judicial education and camaraderie; it serves as the advocate and the outlet that all judges need.


On AJA's Midyear Meeting

Now for reflections about the midyear meeting . . .

The meeting was held at the beautiful Marco Island Marriott Resort, Golf Club and Spa, Florida, May 12-14, 2005. The move from the original hotel on Florida's Sanibel Island was necessitated by lingering hurricane damage.

The Board of Governors and the Executive Committee met to form policy for the organization. In addition, the various committees made recommendations to the Board for approval. As usual, there was time allotted for food, fun, and fellowship at the American Judges Foundation Luncheon held on Friday, as well as the poolside dinner on Friday night.

An additional highlight of the meeting was the educational session regarding Equal Treatment and Access to Justice. The guest speaker was Larry T. Davis, human resources officer of the Colorado Administrative Office of the Courts. After a very thought-provoking presentation, Mr. Davis led the attendees in a frank discussion about gender, race, diversity, and access issues. Thereafter, the judge-participants began building a framework for future AJA policy statements and guidelines related to these issues.

After all the meetings and official business were conducted, there was time left to reconnect with old friends and to meet new ones. The meeting concluded with most in attendance having a renewed commitment to furthering the goals and objectives of the organization—and making plans to reconnect in Anchorage, Alaska, for the Annual Conference, September 18-23, 2005. 



Speaker Larry T. Davis and Judge Mary Celeste at the midyear meeting.