

The Meeting Is the Thing

Steve Leben, AJA President-Elect

Could I have two minutes of your time? If you'll just give me two (or maybe three) minutes, I'll convince you that you ought to make plans to attend the AJA's annual educational conferences in the next two years.

Let me start by saying that you're perfectly normal—most AJA members have never attended. But let me tell you what you missed the past two years and some of what's planned for the next two. Then let's see if we can't get you to pencil in either the dates of October 8-13, 2006 in New Orleans or September 24-29, 2007 in Vancouver—or both—on your calendar.

All of us have the chance to attend educational programs closer to home. I've been attending my state judicial conferences for more than a decade. You will absolutely hear top-notch speakers and programs at our conference that you will not have heard elsewhere.

Last year in San Francisco, we had the National Forum on Judicial Independence, which focused on threats to judicial independence at the trial-court level. In addition, we had a condensed version of the National Judicial College's course on First Amendment and media issues for judges, a program on problem-solving courts with leading researchers and judges, and a symposium on judicial leadership to help those who are—or might like to be—presiding judges or otherwise play a leadership role on their own court.

This year in Anchorage, we had two very extensive programs on electronic discovery and jury-trial innovations. The e-discovery program featured the work of the Sedona Conference, which has developed guidelines for electronic discovery. Attendees learned what's in and on our computers that we don't normally see and how lawyers in contested cases go about trying to find this information. Speakers included the leading researcher in the area at the Federal Judicial Center, a federal magistrate judge, an attorney who has helped in drafting the Sedona Conference guidelines, and an expert in computer forensics. The jury-trial program included two professors who have been involved in national research involving observations of actual jury deliberations and Tom Munsterman, head of the Center for Jury Studies at the National Center for State Courts. In addition, a follow-up session of the judicial leadership symposium and programs on alternative sentencing of impaired drivers, handling domestic violence cases, and understanding search-and-seizure law were on the agenda. And all AJA annual conferences include Professor Charles Whitebread's annual review of the past year's U.S. Supreme Court decisions.

Okay, you say, so there are great educational programs. What else is there? Well, of course there's the

location. This year, 20 minutes from the conference hotel, I got to see three orphaned bear cubs playing with each other, within five feet of me, at a wildlife preserve. And we also have some speakers and programs just for fun. In San Francisco, we heard from Mick Unti, proprietor of the Unti Vineyards, about California wines. In Anchorage, we heard from 16-time Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race competitor Vern Halter, a lawyer by trade and a musher by desire. (To see his background and 2005 race results, go to <http://www.iditarod.com/raceupdates/racemusher.php?id=195>.)



There are two more things that absolutely must be mentioned. First, you have the chance to trade ideas and experiences with judges from all across the United States and with quite a few from Canada. Most of the problems we face are not unique to our courts or areas. Getting views from outside our jurisdictions can be refreshing and just plain helpful in doing our jobs. Second, should you choose to participate in the business meetings of the AJA, you also have a chance to provide input as we do our best to represent you—as an association and as the voice of the judiciary to others.

With that overview, let me make a couple of comments about plans in place for the next two conferences. We have always had a very strong contingent of AJA members in Louisiana and have had some great conferences in New Orleans. Because of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, many of them were unable to attend our Anchorage conference; we missed them greatly. So long as we are able to do so, we will be at the Hotel Monteleone in New Orleans for our 2006 conference, and our Louisiana members are anxious to have it be one of our best ever. The New Orleans Convention and Visitors Bureau has estimated that the area economy is losing \$500 million of tourist business a month; obviously, everything that can be done to get things up and running will be. For 2007, we'll be in Vancouver, where we'll have a joint conference with some Canadian judicial organizations. The AJA has already lined up U.S. Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the Right Honourable Beverly McLachlin, chief justice of Canada, to speak at that conference.

I hope you'll take a moment now to pencil in the dates of these conferences on your calendar. We'd love to see you. 