

Bringing It All Together: Behind the Scenes at an Annual Conference

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Chair, Site Selection Committee

Your check-in at the hotel registration desk went smoothly and you walk into your comfortable room where you will be staying for the five nights of the American Judges Association Annual Conference.

After unpacking you locate the conference registration desk as directed by the sign in the lobby. Shelley Rockwell or a member of her staff greets you and hands you your conference folder and a welcome gift with a bundle of information regarding local attractions.

You find the week is full of educational opportunities, social functions, an off-site evening, and a banquet. You read about a judge's golf tournament and several optional tours. At the conclusion of the day you can socialize with both judges and spouses in a designated hospitality suite. Everything is planned and you're ready to go!

As chairman of the American Judges Association Site Selection Committee for the past three years, I have had the opportunity to be involved with the behind-the-scenes work in planning the midyear meeting and annual conference.

The seed is initially planted approximately three years before the conference date. The Site Selection Committee chooses a location, setting the preparation work in motion. As chairman, I will contact the convention or visitor's bureau of the city selected and provide a general outline of our space needs. This organization will then notify a selected number of hotels in the area, and they will forward to the chairman a general description and brochures of their property. I do as much research as possible and narrow the possibilities down to four or five hotels.

The next step is to send requests for proposals (RFPs) to these hotels, which specify our requirements for number of rooms per night, meeting space, upgrades, meals, park-

ing, and other amenities. The hotels will respond with a proposed contract, including room rates, meal rates, and incidental costs.

Now the real work begins. If at all possible, a site inspection of the various properties is quite useful. Since AJA cannot afford the cost, I usually take a detour from a personal trip and spend a day or two meeting with a representative of a hotel's group sales department for a site inspection. The second best option is to rely on a local judge for a recommendation.

I will then select two hotels and recommend one of them to the Site Selection Committee and request permission to pursue negotiations. I will then inform the selected hotel that the committee has chosen their facility and has granted me permission to use the second hotel as an option if a satisfactory agreement cannot be reached.

This is the beginning of the long and arduous task of selecting the better hotel and further negotiating room rates, meal costs, attrition policy, guarantees, parking rates, upgrades, package delivery service, cut-off dates, exhibitor space, food and beverage minimums, credit arrangements, insurance, damages, complimentary space and amenities for our association, and penalty clauses.

Once the contract is signed, the social activities and tours must be planned with the help of the local host judge and the National Center for State Courts. Recently, I have also served as golf tournament chairman, with the added duties of organizing the outing with our judges and the golf course. Again, most golf courses require a separate contract, and my negotiating skills are put back in use. Skill prizes, door prizes, and last-minute changes in the foursomes always add an interesting twist to this event.

I have never kept a record of the hours required to complete this task, but my best guess would be 50 to 80 hours, not including any site inspections. Although the Site Selection Committee chairman does a great deal of the work, this project could not be completed without the assistance of Shelley Rockwell, our association services administrator at the National Center for State Courts. Somehow, Shelley waves her magic wand and everything comes together through her hard work and efforts.

I hope I have given you a little insight into the making of an annual conference. If matters do not go as planned during your attendance, please bear with us, and we will work with the hotel to correct the problem as best we can. Hope to see all of you in Montreal, Canada, on September 14, 2003. 

NOTICES

Notice is hereby given pursuant to Article V, Section 1, of the bylaws of the American Judges Association that the annual meeting will be held September 14-19, 2003, at the Hotel Omni Mont-Royal in Montreal, Canada. The annual membership meeting will be held Thursday, September 18, at 8:00 a.m. Notice is hereby given that the annual meeting of the American Judges Foundation will be held Monday, September 15, 2003, at noon at the Hotel Omni Mont-Royal. 