

President's Column

WE'RE IN TOUCH, SO YOU BE IN TOUCH

Elliott Zide

It is a privilege and honor to begin my term as your president, especially at a time when AJA is so well respected and highly regarded as the largest judge-only organization in North America.

As I write, I have recently returned from the fantastic 53rd education conference in Hawaii where we were honored by welcoming letters from Hawaii Governor Neil Abercrombie, U.S. Senator Brian Schatz, and U.S. Representative Colleen Hanabusa. Hawaii Chief Justice Mark Recktenwald came in person to open the conference. If you missed this uplifting event and the chance to interact with more than 150 of the best judges in North America and the stellar faculty of 29 distinguished experts in their respective fields, take a moment to go to the "Conference" section of our website (www.amjudges.org) to explore the educational materials from the conference. You too will be proud to say that you are an AJA member!

During the business meetings in Hawaii, the members of the Executive Committee and the Board of Governors had a chance to review AJA's current statement of purpose, which is "to promote and improve the effective administration of justice; to maintain the status and independence of the judiciary; to provide a forum for the continuing education of its members and the general public; and for the exchange of new ideas among all judges."

AJA has been successful because of the strategies it has been using to advance our registered brands: Making Better Judges and the Voice of the Judiciary. There are important roles to be served by robust, voluntary, nongovernmental organizations—made up of judges—in the constellation of volunteer organizations that support and work diligently to achieve the ideal of having judicial organizations (courts) that are open to all and efficiently deliver justice that is credibly fair and impartial based on well-understood principles of the rule of law.

To remain so actively engaged, AJA will need to continue to attract new members, the life's blood of volunteer organizations like AJA; increase the number of AJA members who work actively to achieve the mission and goals of AJA; develop a larger core of AJA members who will take on important leadership functions in the organization; and improve communication and collaboration with other organizations that have similar goals of improving courts.

As your leadership team begins its year, we will be informed by recognizing what AJA has been doing well and we will strive to do even better and with a broader impact in proven activities like educational programs at conferences; its publications—*Court Review*, *Benchmark*, and our blog; and encouraging and publishing white papers like the 2007 paper on procedural fairness, the 2010 paper on judicial selection and retention, and the 2012 paper on judicial decision making (all available on our website). We will soon unveil and market a new web-based education product on domestic violence (see the inside back cover of this issue for more information). We will use our voice in collaboration with partners like Justice at Stake, the American Judicature Society, the National Center for State Courts, the Conference of Chief Justices, the Conference of State Court Administrators, and new groups like the National Forum on Criminal Justice to promote the use of evidence-based practices and to make improvements to the civil and criminal justice systems.



As we go about achieving our mission, we will be more mindful of and informed by the emphasis placed on particular issues by the National Center's publication, *Trends in State Courts*, and by the priorities set by the Conference of Chief Justices. Therefore, AJA will focus on civil and criminal justice reform, access to justice, evidence-based sentencing, other evidence-based court-reengineering initiatives, and advancing the interest in therapeutic justice.

We recognize that building a strong constituency for courts and judges will require more engagement by our individual members with the communities in which we live and work. Not only will we encourage our members to be more involved with educating the public about the value of the work we do in our democracies to deliver justice to all, we expect to develop a toolkit to make it easier for judges to engage ethically and effectively.

I encourage you to become more involved with AJA, your judges' organization. I am confident that by increasing your level of participation, you will be rewarded by being more enthusiastic about your work. I know I have been.

This year's motto will be: we're in touch, so you be in touch with us. I look forward to hearing from you.