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Michael Cicconetti

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President's Column

Michael Cicconetti

It seems as if our Annual Conference in Anchorage took place about a month ago, but it has been many months now since we returned home and my job as president of AJA began. Time seems to disappear and days become a blur when balancing the bench, AJA, and family.

Your officers and Executive Committee have totally immersed themselves in revitalizing the AJA beginning with plans for a great educational and fun-filled annual conference in New Orleans in October. In January, the Executive Committee met for two days discussing our priorities and goals for this year and the future of our organization.

Membership, as always, has been at the top of the discussion list for as long as I have been a member of AJA. Last year, the leadership and Board of Governors authorized the funding of a marketing campaign recently launched by a company called Marketing General. This professional marketing group is now conducting a targeted campaign for new members throughout the country.

Additionally, the Executive Committee, in our own way of improving public relations, authorized extending complimentary memberships to all presidents and vice presidents (or presidents-elect) of all statewide judicial organizations. In introductory correspondence with them, we are encouraging them to attend our annual conference in New Orleans this year. It is our hope they will take a meaningful experience back to their home organizations and promote the AJA.

One objective our organization has somewhat ignored has been the aggressive approach to sponsorships and fundraising. It is my firm belief that if this organization is to expand and flourish, it is critical to obtain outside funding. We, as judges, face an obvious handicap as judicial ethics rules prohibit us from soliciting any contributions or funding. This is where I need your help and suggestions. Although some corporate monies could be used for sponsoring social events, coffee breaks, or meals, this most likely would be advertising dollars from a corporation familiar to judges. Any substantial amounts of money would be and should be through the American Judges Foundation, a 501(C)(3) corporation. The AJF could then contribute those monies to the educational programs of AJA. This would have the affect of freeing up the registration monies for meals and social events rather than underwriting the cost of our educational programs.

How do we do this? I have researched and investigated outside fundraisers and found there are several specialties in this profession. There are general fundraisers, those who seek sponsors for specific events or projects, while others specialize in philanthropic giving or grant money. The costs of their services are either on a project basis with a flat fee or on a per-diem basis with daily expenses. Per-diem rates generally range from \$900

to \$2,000 per day and most of these fundraisers will consult with your organization and work with or train the volunteers of your organization and guide them through the fundraising process. Either way, it is expensive. I have also discovered most fundraising professional associations consider fundraising, on a contingency basis, to be unethical and require their members to sign a pledge not to engage in this form of compensation. The question becomes, do we risk spending more money with the possibility of securing money, or do we place this burden on the officers and board members of the American Judges Foundation with their thoughts as to a "game plan."

Recent times have brought unwarranted criticism to members of the judiciary throughout this country. It is time to begin our public relations work with our citizens at an earlier age. It is incumbent upon us to introduce the children of this country



to the judicial system with the hope that they will understand and respect the role of judges as they grow older. With this thought in mind, we are planning a type of community outreach program at our annual conference in New Orleans. I am currently arranging to have an elementary class of students brought to our conference site hotel for an instructional class. During this time the elementary students would be taught by one of our colleagues through a demonstration of justice in action. Judges attending the conference would observe, with the idea to train judges and for

them to be more comfortable in talking to elementary students in their respective communities.

Following the morning session, the participating judges will then go into the classrooms through the Orleans Parish School District and apply and use the lesson plan of the earlier morning session with the students. We are looking at this project as being beneficial to the judges on a long-term basis but also as a public relations opportunity for the American Judges Association.

Judge Mary Celeste has put in a tremendous effort in putting together an educational program that will offer something for everyone. She has worked extremely long hours and deserves all of our thanks.

Judges Jim McKay, David Gorbaty, John Conery, and Oliver Deleray are planning what sounds to be a spectacular social program. In spite of their personal suffering and inconvenience through Katrina, these judges are steadfast in their desire to show us the true New Orleans style. Of utmost importance is the attendance of our Board of Governors at our midyear meeting in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, May 18-20, 2006. Some of the issues presented in this article and other important issues for our organization require their input and direction. If there was ever a time of opportunity for AJA, it begins now.

I look forward to seeing everyone in May and in October.