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President's Column

Tam Schumann

In every issue of *Court Review*, some new members of the American Judges Association are introduced to the AJA through this column. Others turn here for an update. As the AJA's new president, my first column is a good time to look both backwards at recent activities and forward at the next year's work.

The AJA today has more than 2,000 members, including judges at all levels of the judiciary—-trial and appellate judges, general-jurisdiction and limited-jurisdiction trial judges, and judges in both the United States and Canada. In fact, we have 150 Canadian members, something that greatly enriches the interchange at our annual educational conferences.

In recent years, the AJA has continued its stellar efforts to improve both the judiciary and the skills of its member judges. We take great pride in the annual educational conferences, which offer several days of top-notch programming arranged by the AJA's Education Committee. I have presented and attended judicial educational programs in many states and forms but I have never found better programming than we offer at the AJA's annual educational conference. I sincerely hope you'll make plans to join us in Las Vegas September 13 to 18, 2009, and give us a try.

The past two years have brought some innovative new programming initiatives to the AJA. Two years ago, the AJA issued its first white paper: *Procedural Fairness: A Key Ingredient in Public Satisfaction*. That paper was approved by the AJA in 2007 and formed the basis for the special issue of *Court Review* you recently received. The AJA's paper was officially endorsed in July 2008 by the Conference of State Court Administrators, which consists of the top judicial administrator in each state. The California court system has begun a major program on procedural fairness, which began on its own but has benefitted from AJA's common efforts. In addition, the authors of the AJA white paper, Minnesota judge Kevin Burke, now AJA secretary, and Kansas judge Steve Leben, AJA's past president, have presented the concepts set forth in the paper to more than 1,000 judges around the country, with additional presentations in the works. The paper, the special issue of *Court Review*, and the educational presentations have helped judges to improve the skill set needed to make sure that those who come through our courts feel that they have been treated fairly.

Last year, AJA introduced its Tell It to the Judge program. Conceived by then-AJA president Eileen Olds and carried out under the direction of a committee headed by Michigan judge Libby Hines, judges in selected courtrooms in Arizona, California, Kansas, Missouri, Nevada, Ohio, and Oregon surveyed everyone who came through their courtrooms during the week of July 14. Designed as a pilot program, the one-page survey gave participating judges important feedback about the perceptions of those who came through the court about fairness and public satisfaction. Research staff at the National Center for State Courts helped with the project.

In the coming year, we plan to continue to expand the breadth of our dynamic organization. First, we will prepare a new white paper focusing on the key areas of judicial wellness and judicial stress. The paper will address current issues in the legal field and the relevance of stress to those issues. The paper will also offer suggestions to our governing bodies as to the maintaining of judicial wellness. I believe that this topic is of particular importance in these times of economic crisis. With people losing their jobs and homes, and with other financial assets in jeopardy, demands on the judiciary as a whole are bound to increase as well. An effective system of defining, recognizing, and handling stress will allow judges to more effectively deal with this increase both in our caseload and in the stress level of those who come before us.

Second, we must encourage communication within the court family. As a result, I am working to further improve lines of communication between AJA and other organizations that have common interests. This will include the National Association for Court Management, the Conference of State Court Administrators, and the National Court Reporters Association. All of us can be more effective through common efforts.

Common efforts are also the key to a successful judiciary—and to a successful AJA. Let us know of ways we can be of more help to you. And please give consideration to attending the AJA's annual educational conference in September 2009 in Las Vegas. You will leave Vegas refreshed in your commitment to being the best judge you can be and equipped with ideas that can help you to achieve this goal, which is common to us all.