

2012

President's Column

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President's Column

Toni M. Higginbotham

The American Judges Association Executive Committee recently had its first meeting for 2013. This is where a lot of the hard work for our organization takes place, and this meeting was a huge success in furthering our mission of serving as the Voice of the Judiciary® and in Making Better Judges. I want to take this opportunity to introduce and highlight your executive committee members.

President-Elect Judge Elliott Zide is a trial judge from Massachusetts. He and his wife, Dr. Michelle Zide, a college professor, are the parents of three daughters and three granddaughters. World travelers, they just returned from Africa; they enjoy spending time at their country home in Vermont.

Vice President Judge Brian MacKenzie is a district judge from Michigan, and he and his wife are both active in national court-related organizations. They have been on an adventure in Thailand to celebrate her special birthday.

Secretary Judge John Conery of Louisiana was just sworn in as an appeals-court judge after serving as a trial judge for 18 years. He has served as President of the Louisiana District Judges Association and as Chair of the Capital Crimes Benchbook Committee. Together, he and his wife, Brooksie, have five children and nine grandchildren.

Longtime Treasurer Judge Harold Froehlich just retired as a trial judge in Wisconsin. He continues to serve by appointment, but finds time to live part-time in Florida with his wife. Following in his footsteps, Harold's son was recently elected to the bench. Harold is a big-time Packers fan.

Immediate Past President Kevin Burke is a trial judge from Minnesota, as is his wife, Judge Susan Burke. He is a nationally known writer and teacher to the judiciary. The apple of their eye—and their boss—is their nine-year-old daughter, Kate.

At Large Executive Committee Member Judge Elizabeth Hines is a trial judge from Ann Arbor, Michigan, who is nationally known as a domestic-violence expert. She and her husband, Rusty (who is active in the American Judges Foundation), are the parents of one daughter, a young lawyer, who recently was married.

Executive Committee Member Judge Paul deMahy has served since 1986 on a rural general-jurisdiction trial court in South Louisiana. Paul and his wife, Marilyn, have raised five children in St. Martinville and now have 14 grandchildren. He is active in Kiwanis and the Knights of Columbus.

Executive Committee Member Justice Russell Otter has been a judge in the Ontario Court of Justice since 1993, presiding over family, criminal, and youth cases in Toronto, Ontario. He has been Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Provincial Court Judges for ten years. For over 40 years, he has been a volunteer fitness instructor for the

YMCA. Russ is thrilled to be the Canadian member of the AJA Executive Committee, and he deeply appreciates how the AJA has embraced its Canadian members. Most of all, he is happiest with his three gorgeous grandchildren, two boys and a girl.

Judge John Williams has been a municipal judge in Kansas City, Missouri, since 1995; he has served the court as its presiding judge and created its mental-health court. John and his wife, Molly, an attorney and teacher, are the parents of a beautiful 14-year-old daughter, Natalie, who has been attending AJA conferences since she was born.

Thank you so much for allowing me to serve as your President. I joined AJA in 1997, and it has really made a difference in my judicial life. I served on the district court as a family-court judge for 14 years, before being elected to the Court of Appeal in 2010, where I currently serve. As former President of the Louisiana Council of Family and Juvenile Court Judges, I also served as President of the American Judges Foundation. My husband, Leo, a former judge, and I are parents of four grown children, three of whom are attorneys, and we are the grandparents of six. Currently I am serving as Chairman of the Uniform Rules for Family Courts Committee, developing rules to make it simpler to practice law in all family courts of the state. My joy in life is spending time with my family. I am also a big sports fan.

Our first order of business was finalizing our midyear meeting, which will be held May 2-4 in Orlando at the Wyndham Lake Buena Vista. It will be an opportunity for excellent judicial education, for sharing conversations with our colleagues from the U.S. and Canada, and for collaborating with the Florida Judiciary. Bring your families.

Really exciting is our annual fall conference September 22-27 at the Fairmont Orchid on the Kohala Coast in Hawaii. We believe your Education Committee has developed a premier program for us. The educational program will include sessions with national experts on sentencing, including evidence-based sentencing; dealing with drunk/drugged driving and sobriety courts; electronic discovery/evidence implications; domestic-violence innovations including the area of LGBT; juvenile courts; technology in the courtroom; high-profile cases and the media; and the U.S. Supreme Court review by Professor Erwin Chemerinsky. In addition, professionalism and ethics will round out the program.

One of the exciting developments is the new format that is being offered to take advantage of the educational offerings, as well as the locale. On Tuesday and Wednesday, the hours will be from 7:30 a.m. until 1:00 p.m.—the same maximum number of hours we've always had but starting earlier so that the rest of the day can be used to experience Hawaii. Hope to see you on the Big Island in Hawaii!

