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President's Column

Catherine Shaffer

I am honored to join our distinguished line of American Judges Association presidents, and I congratulate you on getting and reading another wonderful edition of *Court Review*, one of the crown jewels of AJA. This journal has changed my own practice, always for the better. For example, I now offer “high-touch” management to lawyers in my complex civil cases, based on an article in a past issue. (See David Prince, *A New Model for Case Management: Efficiency Through Intrinsic Engagement*, 50 CT. REV. 174 (2014).) The lawyers love this approach, and it streamlines case handling even in the most difficult cases. Although the Board of Editors’ membership is changing, with a smooth transition managed by Judge Steve Leben, we know the quality of this journal will continue.

I just returned from our annual conference in Cleveland, Ohio. We were honored to hear inspiring addresses by Ohio Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor, Ohio Congresswoman Marcia Fudge, and, at our American Judges Foundation luncheon, featured speaker U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown. Highlights of the educational program, ably planned by Judge Eugene Lucci and Judge Gayle Williams-Byers, included Dean Erwin Chemerinsky’s fabulous constitutional-law update, wonderful plenaries on cutting-edge issues (including judicial independence and addressing unfair fines and fees), as well as a law-and-literature presentation by outstanding author Joe Starita. We also had a huge variety of top-notch choice sessions, on topics like how self-help centers can improve court litigation, new approaches to court technology, dealing with jury bias, an elder law and guardianship update, approaches to wrongful-death lawsuits in police-shooting cases, ways to provide procedural and pretrial justice in adult and juvenile court, tips on high-profile cases, and ways to handle life beyond the bench. Our family members joined us at Mr. Starita’s plenary, and also attended an excellent presentation on the Judicial Family Network program.

As usual, AJA gave awards to an outstanding group of recipients. I want to highlight the judicial courage award, named after our own brave Harold Froehlich. This year’s recipient was Gonzalo P. Curiel, the federal judge who persevered with dignity in presiding over the Trump University lawsuit despite then-candidate Donald Trump’s attacks based on the judge’s Latino heritage. Do read his eloquent letter of thanks in this edition of *Court Review*. AJA will continue to honor judicial courage and independence, stand up for the rule of law in our role as the Voice of the Judiciary[®], support equal justice, and work to advance diversity in our national judicial community.

The social events in Cleveland were marvelous, due to an enormous amount of work by our own Judge Mike Cicconetti, who received a well-deserved standing ovation at our banquet, and our education cochairs. Conference attendees attended a sold out baseball game—the 19th win in the Cleveland Indians’ historic 22-game win streak!—between Cleveland and the

Detroit Tigers, toured local landmarks like the Terminal Tower and the Cleveland Trust Building, enjoyed the AJF reception at the historic Cuyahoga County Courthouse, visited Little Italy, went to the Cleveland Art Museum and dined at the top-rated restaurant there, and made group visits on successive days to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. We all enjoyed Cleveland’s other fine restaurants too.

There is plenty planned for the coming year. Our midyear conference will be in Memphis, Tennessee, famous as a birthplace of rock ‘n’ roll and home of the blues, renowned for its barbecue, and the site of the National Civil Rights Museum, Beale Street, the Memphis Rock and Soul Museum, and Graceland. Our venue is on the grounds of Graceland, and Judge

Betty Moore and Justice Robert Torres are planning a fantastic education program, as well as events that let you taste the BBQ, hear the music, and learn about the civil-rights history. Sign up soon!

We have a great program set for Kauai in September 2018 already. Judge Catherine Carlson and Justice Torres have practically the entire education program planned already, and what could be a more wonderful venue than this beautiful Hawaiian garden island?

We do face challenges. We need to plan smart for our conferences, to make sure our attendance is strong and that we can continue

to afford to go to worthwhile locations and offer top-quality education. We have succeeded when we have partnered with other organizations, as in Seattle when our conference was held jointly with the National Association of State Judicial Educators and the Washington state courts. We are following that formula for September 2019, when we will be at the beautiful downtown Drake Hotel in Chicago, partnering with the Illinois state courts. Mark your calendars now! And think about how we can join with the courts in your area, because the earlier we plan joint events, the better and more successful they are, and the more new blood flows into our membership.

We also need rededication to our committees and, through those, to serving our members who do not come to conference. You are one of our incredibly talented members, and we need you to find the AJA committee that matters to you, so that AJA can take your input and turn it into outstanding articles in *Court Review*, premier resources on our website, superb presentations at conference, and, in general, great guidance to the rest of us on being better judges. If you haven’t filled out your committee-preference form already, do it now and ship it to Shelley Rockwell (srockwell@ncsc.org)! We need you and your knowledge, passion, and engagement.

You probably know that AJA has strong ties to many other national court organizations. My executive committee is already at work trying to build further ties to national minority associations. I have a busy year ahead tending these links on AJA’s behalf, and I plan to keep you updated electronically on a regular basis. Until then, thank you again for this honor.

