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President's Column

Peter Sferrazza

Dear AJA members and colleagues.

My condolences to anyone who has lost a family member or friend to the Coronavirus.

For 36 years, Shelley Rockwell served as the administrative support person for the AJA managing our association. She retired at the end of April this year. Shelley has been the glue that held the AJA together in good times and bad.

Unfortunately, both of her parents were hospitalized with COVID-19. They didn't have a chance against this devastating disease. Her mother passed away on April 26 and her father on April 28. Her only consolation was that they shared a room in hospice and were so happy to be together. The kind nurse sent her a photo of them holding hands at the end. We were saddened to learn of her loss.

As President of the AJA, it has been my honor and pleasure to have worked with Shelley Rockwell. She will be missed by all of us. On behalf of the AJA family, I urge you to make a contribution to the WHO in memory of her mother and father. Here is the link: <https://covid19responsefund.org/>. Please check the "in memory" box and add the names of "Earl and Doris Rubenking." If you email me your receipts, I will bundle them and forward them to Shelley. Thanks for your generosity.

These have been trying times for all of us, and the AJA is no exception. We have had to weather the pandemic to the best of our ability.

The 2020 AJA Midyear Conference scheduled for April 23rd in Napa, California, was cancelled due to health and safety concerns about COVID-19 and the travel bans imposed by entities that traditionally participate in the conference. We regret that we were forced to cancel the AJA Midyear Conference, but as a judicial organization, it was the right thing to do. Fortunately the conference was cancelled without penalty and will be rescheduled for April of 2022.

In light of the pandemic, I also met with our Executive Committee about our planned annual meeting in Philadelphia. Because many of our judges, including our Canadian judges, will not be able to travel to Philadelphia, the likelihood that social distancing will still be in effect, and the lack likelihood that we will have a vaccine, we decided to cancel the annual meeting in Philadelphia.

Pursuant to the "Force Majeure" provision of the contract entered between the AJA and the Hilton Philadelphia at Penn's Landing, we determined that there exists an "...emergency making it illegal or impossible to provide the facilities or hold the

meeting." We requested cancellation of our contract without any penalty. That request was granted. We plan to return to Philadelphia for our annual meeting next year and that should be in the August/September time frame.

Article VI provides that the General Assembly shall convene during the annual conference of the association at the call of the president at the site of such conference and that only members present and in good standing shall be entitled to vote at the General Assembly. Proxies are not valid to vote at the General Assembly meeting for any purpose.

Article XI allows the Board of Governors and the Executive Committee to meet electronically or by telephone, but no such provision is made for the General Assembly.

Accordingly we will have an annual Executive Committee and Board of Governors meeting as originally scheduled but since we are not able to have an annual conference in person this year, the meeting of the General Assembly will of necessity be continued until the annual meeting in New Orleans next year.

The AJA's mission is to help our members become even better judges by providing high-quality judicial training and education at our annual and midyear conferences. We will continue to fulfill our mission during the pandemic by holding a

series of webinars.

Our thanks to Libby Hines for producing the first three AJA/NCSC webinars funded by a grant from SJI. The three webinars addressed (1) behavior of domestic violence perpetrators and victims; (2) procedural fairness; and (3) standard field sobriety tests and drugged driving.

The webinars received rave reviews. The third webinar presenters, Judge Kevin Burke and the Hon. Mary Celeste (ret.), were particularly noteworthy. They gave us a great deal of practical information and resources useful to trial court judges.

At each of the live webinars, participants were able to ask questions of the expert presenters. The presenters touched on the impact the pandemic was having on the issues each addressed. The webinars were recorded by NCSC and are posted on the AJA website for those who were unable to participate in the live presentation.

Thanks to Elliott Zide, I am pleased to inform you that the American Judges Association has been awarded an SJI grant to support the AJA 2020 Education Program. Check out our website for future webinars.

Stay healthy and maintain your social distance for a safer world.

