

President's Column

Yvette Mansfield Alexander

Greetings my Esteemed Colleagues and *Court Review* Readers,

I am humbled by the opportunity to serve as President of the American Judges Association for a second term. I will continue to strive to assure that our membership is informed, involved, and in touch with each other. All because I know that the heartbeat of the American Judges Association is our membership. My focus this year will be on Access to Justice, Judicial Wellness, and Court Technology. Our jobs are often stressful and our mental and physical health should be at the forefront of our priority list. A huge part of conquering our health concerns is implementing mindfulness in a daily routine. We must learn not to overreact, to set healthy boundaries, breathe, meditate, exercise, eat healthy, recite affirmations, be thankful, and surround ourselves with people who are happy! This new post-COVID era is arranged around technology. To keep up with the times we must board that technology train. For those reasons, our annual conference in Hawaii, September 9-14, 2023 will focus on all things technology.

COVID separated us and now it's time for us all to come together as a collegial body. We must all demonstrate unity, collegiality, professionalism, and show respect for one another. Today our country is divided over many issues. The division manifests itself in even the courtrooms. Different opinions and ideas have always existed. The difference now is in the incivility and disrespect given to opposing views. The division in this country has catapulted into disdain and disrespect for the judiciary. I recently participated in a podcast sponsored by the National Association for Court Management on the topic, "What do your neighbors think about the court system?" The one thing that dominated the conversation was how respect for the judiciary has diminished. We must work diligently daily to dismantle this perception or reality. Our courts must prove that they are fair, just, and equitable. Our democracy depends on it.

As I am writing this message our hearts are heavy as we mourn the loss of one of our own, Chief Justice Max Baer (Supreme Court of Pennsylvania). Our deepest condolences to his family, friends, and all of those who knew and loved him. He was the ultimate host at our annual conference in Philadelphia last August. Chief Justice Baer was a true scholar and champion for justice. He will be greatly missed.

I attended a Judicial Leadership Academy sponsored by the National Center for State Courts. It offered me the awesome opportunity to meet and learn from other judicial leaders from around the country. We examined different avenues in which leaders can challenge the status quo to push beyond our comfort zones and achieve success. The academy provided the partici-

pants with valuable information on a multitude of issues dealing with leadership and also provided a template to be used as a road map for leaders. For to whom much is given, much is required. As judges we are all leaders.

The AJA has a long and successful history of providing great judicial education, "Making Better Judges," promoting and improving the administration of justice and sustaining the independence of the judiciary, while helping to ensure that courts have due process, are fair and assessable to all. However, like any organization we must be able to change with the times. We must find innovative ways to connect with our members in a more effective and strategic manner. Our plan is to reexamine ourselves

to find out what our members want and attempt to meet them "where they are." As we continue to celebrate our past we must cast a vision for the future by building on the past to create an exceptional future. I am in awe of the perseverance and grit this organization continues to display in the face of adversity. I've watched the extraordinary talents of our AJA members... from putting on virtual events to having in-person conferences, inspiring others to extend their talents to promote and strengthen this association. We must push for improved outcomes that lead us to a place of growth. What we are trying to do is activate as many judges as possible. We

want to grow our membership not just in members but in active participation to produce excellent products for not just ourselves but also for the benefit of those we serve. We must challenge each other. To strengthen this association we have to be committed and dedicated to the goals of the American Judges Association.

I truly believe in collaboration and know that the only way for us to fully reach the next major milestone is to be actively seeking out feedback from the people who ushered AJA here—its members. We want to hear how we can better serve you through our services, events, publications, and beyond. Thank you for your continued support of the American Judges Association, and I look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas. I challenge each of you to spend a few minutes looking at the AJA website and review the opportunities to serve. If you are already serving, thank you! If you are not, take this as an opportunity to get involved. We hope you will join us in San Antonio, Texas, April 13-15, 2023 for our midyear conference and in Hawaii, September 9-14, 2023 for our annual conference. Both promise to be educational and amusing.

This is the start of a new year for AJA. We should change things that need to be changed and preserve them where they need to be preserved. Let's make it better together! The best is yet to come!

