

President's Column

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My travels this year have given me the opportunity to spread the word about the benefits of AJA membership. My message has been simple: Every judge needs to belong to a national judges' organization that represents *all* judges, not just a narrow section or division of judges and not just a bar association with a small minority of judge members. Those kinds of organizations have a role to play, but they can't speak beyond their narrow focus or with one voice. The AJA can do both.

The reception I've received to this message has been positive but we, as an organization, need to do more. Toward that end, last spring our Executive Committee voted to suspend indefinitely the first-year-free membership that we had offered for many years and replace it with a new "Member-Get-a-Member" campaign. The details of this program have been sent to you in the mail and in *Benchmark*. The point I want to make here is simply that all of us can spread the word about the benefits of AJA membership as we attend our local and state judicial conferences and as we communicate with our judicial colleagues on a daily basis. You, as an AJA member, are the best ambassador we have.

The AJA has a critical role to play in the coming national battles over judicial independence, selection and retention of judges, and salaries and benefits for judges. These issues are critical to the future independence of our courts. But that role is diminished if our numbers are declining. Membership in a state association is vital, but I've learned in my year as your AJA president that judges have key *national* allies with which state judicial organizations may not have open lines of communication. I've also discovered that attacks on the courts take familiar forms, whether in different states or even in Canada. Therefore, a national judicial organization is needed to educate the public and media about the necessity for an independent judiciary. Toward this end, the AJA sought and obtained a grant from the Joyce Foundation of Chicago to put on the National Forum on Judicial Independence at our annual conference in San Francisco.

AJA involvement in substantive national issues must continue. In the past year, I appointed Judge Leo Bowman of Michigan to serve on the joint committee of CCJ/COSCA deal-

ing with problem-solving courts. He also served as the AJA representative on "A National Survey of the Court's Capacity to Provide Protection Orders" established by the National Institute of Justice. Judge Lynda Howell of Arizona and I participated in an expert panel on "The Judge's Role in the Reduction of Impaired Driving," an ongoing educational project funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and administered by the National Center for State Courts. Your next AJA president, Judge Gayle Nachtigal of Oregon, has developed a program of education for presiding judges and those who aspire to such administrative judicial positions, which is scheduled for our next annual conference.

These initiatives put the AJA "brand" name on important educational efforts to train judges and court personnel.

When I became AJA president last year, I expressed as a goal the need to continue the AJA's tradition of providing solid educational programs at our annual and midyear conferences, along with strong social events at each to facilitate the meeting and making of friends and colleagues from across

the nation. I also wanted to strengthen our ties with other judicial organizations. Our joint midyear meeting in Savannah with the National Association for Court Management (NACM) was a success in all three respects. NACM put on an excellent educational program that had relevance to judges, court administrators, and clerks. The joint nature of the meeting made it possible for AJA members to share concerns of common interest with the members of NACM. And, of course, the social program was top notch, particularly the fabulous Super Bowl party. This is just an example of the kind of partnership the AJA can benefit from with other national judicial organizations.

This past year has been exciting and exhausting. I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I thank all AJA members for your good wishes and your wise counsel. I thank the scores of judges who volunteered their time and energy to make this year a successful one. Your involvement and support of the AJA and its many important activities is the indispensable ingredient for its continued success.

