

President's Column

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In the history of the American Judges Association, an ongoing issue has been obtaining a responsible, professional agency to provide services for the organization. I have heard stories from members about \$15,000 debts left behind by a planner at a meeting in Colorado and of home improvement projects undertaken with AJA monies. Judge Ira Raab tells of a major battle to finally go professional and contract for the services of the National Center for State Courts in 1982.

Many of our members may not be aware of what NCSC is, who their employees are and what they do for us by way of help in the operation of the AJA on a day-to-day basis. This column is intended to be an introduction.

The NCSC was established in 1971 by the chief justices of several states, acting in response to a call by Chief Justice Warren Burger for a national organization that would be concerned with improving the management and administration of state judicial systems. The NCSC is a non-profit organization, governed by a Board of Directors whose members are appointed by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators and includes judges and administrators drawn from state trial and appellate courts and from the private sector. From the beginning the NCSC has carried out a vigorous program of technical assistance to state courts, research on basic judicial management and administration issues, and education and training for state judicial officials. In 1984 the educational function was strengthened by the merger with the Institute for Court Management. During the 1980's the role of the Center was broadened to include support for associations of state judicial officials. At present this program provides support for seven organizations in addition to the support for CCJ and COSCA.

The goal of the NCSC is to improve the administration of justice and to provide leadership and service to the state courts. In 1997, a strategic planning process identified support for the development and operations of associations of state judicial officials that have goals consistent with those of the NCSC as a primary means for realizing that goal.

In keeping with those goals, the NCSC invited the AJA Executive Committee to visit Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1997, during Judge Shirley Strickland-Saffold's presidency. Roger Warren, NCSC President, wanted to show us the facilities, introduce us to their staff, and to work through some issues that had to be addressed and resolved for the mutual benefit of both organizations. In the course of the meeting, we toured the Williamsburg facilities and learned of the many services offered by NCSC for court personnel, including (1) the Court Technology Laboratory, which is a project of NCSC's Technology Information Exchange Service and includes Courtroom 21, which was demonstrated at our annual meeting in Orlando, thanks to Judge Jeffrey Rosinek's planning and preparation; (2) the NCSC Library, housing about 35,000 volumes, 4,000 micro-

forms, audiotapes, videotapes and computerized research services; (3) the Court Services division, which provides information on local, state and national resources for the improvement of state court systems; (4) the Information Service, which offers information research services for little or no cost; and (5) the Institute for Court Management, which offers educational programs in judicial information.

The agreement between NCSC and AJA makes the following services available to the Association or to individual members at no cost: use of meeting rooms and conference space at the NCSC headquarters in Williamsburg; access to the extensive and unique library collection of material pertaining to all aspects of judicial systems; use of the Information Service to respond to requests for information on court-related subjects; and reports from the Office of Government Relations on federal legislation and administrative agency actions that affect the state court systems.

Some NCSC employees whom we see at our meetings bear special mention, since they work directly with AJA in the planning and conduct of our meetings and activities during the year.

- Dr. Thomas A. Henderson is the Executive Director of the Association Services Division and Director of Government Relations for NCSC. He directs activities in support of several court organizations, including AJA. His B.A. is from Haverford and his Ph.D. is from Columbia University.

- Shelley Rockwell is the Association Management Specialist for AJA. She has been with us and NCSC for fifteen years. She is from Fairfax, Virginia, and received her B.A. in history and English from the College of William & Mary. Shelley is the principal contact person for the ongoing AJA activities handled through NCSC.

- Anne Kelly is the manager of the Center's publications program. She works with our Publications Committee in producing *Benchmark* and *Court Review*. Anne got her B.A. in history from Loretto Heights College.

- Montrice Smith is new to NCSC. She is from upstate New York. We will probably meet her for the first time in Fort Worth, Texas, at our mid-year meeting.

- Dr. Frank Gavin, Director of the Institute for Court Management, has provided valuable assistance to AJA at the meetings of our Long-Range Planning Committee and at the Executive Committee Retreat, where implementation of the plan was studied, a course of action decided, and tasks assigned to members of the Committee.

Of course, our association with NCSC is always open to contractual negotiation and modification of the terms of our agreement. Our experiences with NCSC as a service provider have been highly beneficial, but not without some disagreements and contention. Happily, they have not left us with a \$15,000 unpaid debt. Nor have they remodeled their homes at our expense.

