

President's Column

Michael R. McAdam

As I wrote this, the National Center for State Courts had just completed the Eighth Court Technology Conference (CTC8) in Kansas City, Missouri. I was fortunate to be able to participate in CTC8 as your president and as a local host. My thoughts about CTC8 follow several lines of analysis, one about the role of technology in our courts, another about the impact of the National Center, and a third about the international nature of technology.

These were to be the primary subjects of this column until Roger Warren, president of the National Center, announced his resignation, effective summer 2004, at the National Center's board meeting in Washington, DC last November. This former California Superior Court judge from Sacramento has served with distinction and energy for the past eight years at the National Center, even though he committed to only five years of service when he moved his family east to Williamsburg, Virginia.

My involvement with the National Center had been limited until last year, when I made four separate trips to Williamsburg representing the AJA, as a participant on a panel on impaired driving and as your president. Each time I've been there, I've been impressed with the professionalism and expertise of the Center's staff in all departments. The universal attitude demonstrated by the employees I've encountered has been positive, friendly, and efficient. These values ultimately flow from only two sources—the individuals who work at the Center and their leader, Roger Warren. Even exemplary employees will eventually cut corners and settle for less if the leadership allows it. It's clear to me that Roger Warren set an example that didn't allow that to happen. Best wishes and good luck to you, Roger, in whatever challenges you pursue in the future.

The role of the National Center is a fitting topic for examination by the AJA. We, as an organization, rely on the Center's staff for research, advice, and administrative services, all of which are provided to the AJA at a cost that is not market-based. If we had to pay for these services "a la carte," we would not be able to

remain in business. So, the National Center is a critical partner with the AJA. The AJA can never surrender its independence to another organization and our relationship with the National Center allows the AJA to maintain its ability to chart its own course for the benefit of its members. When the AJA participates in National Center events, as we did at CTC8, we get the benefit of the Center's cutting-edge involvement in technology without expending the enormous resources it would take to produce a similar program ourselves. The AJA's relationship with the National Center remains strong and will continue to grow under its new leadership.



About CTC8: it was a success with 97 vendors and 2,300 attendees from around the world. Judges, court administrators, and vendors came from 48 states and 30 nations on 5 continents. It was truly an international event. The AJA extended membership to every judge who attended CTC8 who was not already an AJA member. Also, every vendor at CTC8 was approached about displaying its products and services at the next AJA annual conference in San Francisco this October. These are contacts and connections that will prove to be invaluable in the future.

CTC8 did one more thing: it revealed to this non-technologically inclined judge that we, as judges, will be forever dependent upon technology, and blessed or cursed by it in ways that our judicial ancestors could not imagine. Issues of privacy, access, and judicial independence will become more common as executive-department computer programmers and legislative-branch budget experts and allied professionals will treat the judiciary as just another client, no different from the water department, the election commission, or the zoning board. It will be necessary to remind them that we represent the third branch of government and as such are to be accorded a much different status. There will be battles in the future to be fought along these lines. Some have already begun. The AJA needs to be in the forefront of this conflict, working on behalf of all judges.