

President's Column

A RECIPE TO MOVE AJA FORWARD

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I write this message energized by the exciting AJA midyear meeting and Scottsdale, Arizona, the site of the meeting. Over the course of the two-and-a-half days spent together networking with colleagues, getting reacquainted with longtime AJA friends, and making new ones, we were able to spend time in structured sessions celebrating our achievements and planning new strategies to move AJA forward. We learned new skills and ways of thinking to make better judges. Based on the evaluations, all of the planning and education sessions received “excellent” ratings both for content and faculty/facilitator skills.

AJA remains the largest and possibly the most robust judicial organization representing boots-on-the-ground judges in the United States and Canada. We are well branded as the Voice of the Judiciary® and are preeminent at Making Better Judges®. This was confirmed when we reviewed our achievements over the last 10 years.

We benefit from the considerable volunteer efforts of individual members of our organization. So, in case you ever wonder about the truth of the adage “what goes around, comes around,” consider this: Kevin Burke was not able to be in Scottsdale because he was pursuing AJA’s branding in the area of procedural fairness by speaking to judges at a conference in my home state of Massachusetts. When he was finished, he sent me the following text:

I had [a] terrific experience [in Massachusetts]. Several years ago, a Massachusetts judge set bail on a guy who went on a killing spree in Seattle. It was, as you may recall, horrific. Mitt Romney attacked her. Steve Leben and I wrote a commentary for the *Seattle Times* defending her. Neither Steve nor I knew her. We just thought she was a judge in need of a defense. When the article was published, I never heard from her. But when I came in the room yesterday, she sought me out and was pretty pro-

fuse in her thanks. She said it was a hard time for her. She had stopped reading newspapers and watching the news. Her husband found the article and said: “You should read this.” That exchange with her made the trip to Boston worthwhile. Thanks for getting me there.

This is just one example of the work our members do to make AJA a voice for judges.

But Scottsdale was more than just feeling good about the past. The enthusiasm expressed during the participatory planning and education sessions carried forward to the business portions of the conference where AJA’s entire leadership committed to working in a more focused and robust way to achieve the following four goals:

1. Be a stronger and clearer voice BOTH of and for the judiciary.
2. Make better judges.
3. Provide and promote more innovative and high-quality educational opportunities for judges and the public.
4. Play a key role in fulfilling the promise of justice for all by advocating for and promoting strategies that evidence supports as being effective in improving the administration of justice.

To help achieve these goals, AJA’s leadership understands that AJA must retain its membership, revitalize the commitment of members to the goals of the organization, and increase the number of members. AJA is committed to the principle that AJA does its best work at making better judges when we work together in robust ways to make each other better judges. That is our recipe to make AJA grow and prosper. So look at our website—www.amjudges.org—to learn more specifics about our good work.

I’m proud of our organization and proud to represent it.

