

# President's Column

Catherine Shaffer

My dear colleagues and *Court Review* readers, greetings.

I want to begin by highlighting our outstanding midyear conference in Memphis. It included an excellent minority community outreach event at the law school attended by three separate high schools, a well-attended group tour of the powerfully moving National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Hotel, a welcoming address from a Supreme Court Justice, an outstanding day of educational programs, and a fabulous evening barbecue event at Albert's on Beale Street. Justice Torres and Judge Betty Moore planned the conference, but Justice Torres and I agree Judge Moore, the conference chair, deserves huge kudos for it. She found our wonderful venue right across from Graceland, organized the outreach event and educational programs, introduced the speakers, planned the barbecue, and got so many sponsorships that the conference made a significant profit. Thank you again, Judge Moore!

Coming up soon on my calendar as your President are the racial justice and reconciliation symposium AJA is co-sponsoring with the National Judicial College and a host of other national organizations on July 16 at Logan College near St. Louis. Later in July I am scheduled to attend the National Association for Court Management (NACM) annual meeting in Atlanta. In August I am due to go to the combined Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) annual meeting in Newport, Rhode Island. And then in September, of course, we have our outstanding conference program in Kauai, Hawai'i, the product of a tremendous planning effort by Justice Torres and Judge Catherine Carlson. It is already so popular that our AJA room block has sold out!

For this, my final *Court Review* column, however, I want to return to the linked goals I have pursued over this past year and their significance at this time in history. Those goals, as you know, are 1) enhancing the value of AJA membership for those who are unable to attend conferences, 2) building on AJA's advances toward diversity in our organization, on our benches, and improving understanding and responses to diversity issues in our courts, and 3) strengthening AJA's ties to and collaborations with other national court-oriented organizations.

I, my Executive Committee, AJA's committees, and the force that is Mary Celeste have worked hard over this past year to develop increased value for the membership of each person who belongs to AJA. Some of that value is monetary, such as the discounts and scholarships and free CLEs you can access as a member. Some is intellectual, such as the cutting edge information you find in each edition of *Court Review*. And some of

it is the value of networking with other judicial officers who share friendship and a deeper sense of shared values.

What are these shared values? I feel confident, dear colleagues, that we mutually venerate the rule of law and its bedrock assumption that all persons are equal before the law, equally endowed with rights and responsibilities, and equally deserving of opportunity, safety, and liberty. And is it not implicit in these values that we honor the richness that our populations' diversity has brought to our national heritages as American and Canadian judges, that we strive to reflect that

diversity in our courts, and that we seek to provide truly equal justice in the justice system? Finally, how can we carry out these values if we do not cooperate and collaborate with the other national court oriented organizations?

If you wonder what these observations have to do with this moment in history, I will tell you that I believe these values are indeed shared by all of us, regardless of our political preferences and loyalties, but that they are being tested to a greater degree than I have seen before in my lifetime and that we must find the courage to defend

them. Moreover, to do this we must find a way to transcend the extreme polarization that is occurring in the political sphere, to maintain our commitment to honor and celebrate diversity, and to continue to communicate and collaborate with each other and all our national court partners.

Let me talk briefly about some ways we might each find to meet these goals. If you can, come to conferences to mingle with fellow AJA members. If you cannot, maintain your AJA engagement by reading and contributing to *Court Review*, by checking that AJA's regular emails to you are not sidelined by your court's IT system, by reading and commenting on our blog, by joining or continuing to work in the AJA committees that interest you, and by affiliating with AJA's existing partners or helping us widen that network. You can continue to enhance your work on diversity efforts through AJA's committee work, reviewing our presentations on this subject, and supporting AJA's collaboration efforts with other organizations. You can help build those collaboration efforts: you can bring an AJA a conference to your jurisdiction, ideally in cooperation with other judicial organizations in your area, and you can link AJA to the other national court organizations in which you participate.

In short, AJA draws its strength from you, our members, and through AJA, working together, we can all provide strength to each other in challenging times.

Thank you for the honor of serving as your President.

