

Accessing a Bigger Picture Through the AJA

By Steve Leben, AJA Secretary

Day in, day out, we come to our offices, are greeted by a mass of paper or people, and do our best to carry out our assignments for the day. In the midst of this press of business, it's easy to lose sight of the long-sought "big picture"—why we're here and how we fit into the larger system of justice and government.

Having just returned from the American Judges Association's annual educational conference, I'm here to tell you that attending such conferences really is a great way to break out of your daily routine while enhancing your sense of mission and purpose when you return home.

Now I'm not going to pretend that going to Maui didn't, all by itself, help to recharge my batteries. It did—and that's one of the reasons we try to schedule our meetings in good locations. Upcoming conferences for the next three years in Montreal, Anchorage, and San Francisco should help on that score as well.

Another thing that helps, of course, is that we have some great educational sessions with excellent speakers, most of whom we don't see at our regular in-state educational programs. USC law professor Charles Whitebread's annual review of the last year's U.S. Supreme Court decisions is both entertaining and thought provoking (unless, perhaps, you're that rare judge who has already read

every decision handed down in the past year!). Other programs this year gave me some really in-depth understanding of substance abuse and a review of jury reforms that included both new information and different perspectives, including that of a former juror.

What really helps in strengthening your resolve as a judge, though, is having the chance to interact with other judges from around the United States and Canada who, like you, are committed to doing a great job, are interesting people, and have backgrounds and experiences different from your own. Just by way of example, I had some excellent conversations this year with judges from Michigan, Washington, and Canada regarding their attempts to incorporate therapeutic jurisprudence concepts into their domestic violence and drug offender dockets. Those discussions dovetailed nicely with an educational program (developed by the AJA) on judicial involvement with substance abuse programs. And, of at least equal importance, I got to see old friends and make new ones among those who are committed to an enduring and fair system of justice for all.

I know that most of you have never attended one of our national meetings. I hope you'll give some thought to attending next year. bm

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May 15-17

Billings, Montana

The Sheraton Billings

(\$65-\$95 single or double, depending on room type)

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September 14-19

Montreal, Quebec

Omni Hotel Mont-Royal

(\$220 Canadian single or double)