

President's Column

Michael Cicconetti

The first 90 days of my term as president of the American Judges Association have had me criss-crossing this country to attend various judicial and court-related conferences. Family, friends, and colleagues constantly pester me on my fortunes as a frequent traveler. However, the reality of traveling is rushing to the airport, long and nervous waits in security lines, subjecting one's self to nonconsensual search and seizure, capacity-filled airplanes with cramped seats, awful microwaved hamburgers, delayed flights, irritable taxi drivers, foreign-speaking intern reservation clerks at the hotel, mini-bars, and "Save the World" notes about reusing your linens and towels. Oh yes, the glamour of travel! The fun continues with the silent ride in the hotel elevator, or until that silence is broken by the joker who quips, "I hope this is the express car!" and then, to make the elevator travel faster, proceeds to push the already lighted floor button.

Upon entering your room you unpack and soon discover the answer to your own question, "What did I forget this time?" After freshening up you take your laptop and attempt to find a wireless connection somewhere in the hotel to avoid paying the convenient \$9.95 per day hookup in your room. It is always a joy to find 30 new email messages that have arrived, and require a response, between departure from home and arrival at the hotel. Answer the emails, return phone calls, check-in with the family, and head to the conference registration desk. You receive your materials and your name tag and officially begin the duties as AJA Ambassador. Finally, one finds enjoyment by meeting old friends, new acquaintances, and colleagues. It becomes a time of sharing experiences, listening to new ideas, and giving thanks for being a part of the legal profession.

Our organization, the American Judges Association, held a working lunch visionary session at our annual conference in Anchorage, Alaska. In cooperation with the National Center for State Courts, we spent the better part of a day attempting to find a focus for the future of our organization. The Executive Committee will review and discuss the results of this session at our meeting in mid-January.



Steve Leben, AJA's president-elect, and I recently met with National Center president Mary McQueen and members of her staff at the National Center in Williamsburg, Virginia. What began as a get-acquainted visit quickly turned into a valuable brainstorming session on our need to select an issue or topic of interest to all our members. It must be a topic that our members can support, without controversy and with enthusiasm, that will invigorate our officers, Board of Governors, Delegates, and members. Steve and I are fine-tuning an idea for presentation to our Executive Committee and, with their approval, we will disseminate it to all our members. In addition to that topic,

our January Executive Committee meeting discussions will include sponsorships and fundraising, membership surveys, White Paper topics, membership issues, and our involvement with "Justice at Stake" and its projects (see page 44).

In addition to determining a focal issue, I firmly believe monetary sponsorships are paramount to the success of AJA. If there is one lesson I have learned from traveling to various conferences, it is recognizing the necessity of raising money through the American Judges Foundation to underwrite the cost of our educational and conference expenditures. Sponsorships from vendors, law firms, corporations, and other foundations will allow us to budget our dues money for membership promotions and not to cover conference costs.

Our annual conference attendance has been steadily declining, resulting in budgetary losses. We must stop the financial bleeding. Obtaining outside income is the only real answer. I will be asking the Executive Committee for suggestions as to the method. Do we ask our AJF members to campaign for sponsorships or do we look to an outside professional fundraiser? One way or another, it is time to stop talking about this issue at our semi-annual meetings and begin a more aggressive approach to fundraising.

I, along with the other officers, am looking forward to a productive and meaningful Executive Committee meeting. If any members have any thoughts ideas for the betterment of the association, please contact me as soon as possible.