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President's Column

John Conery

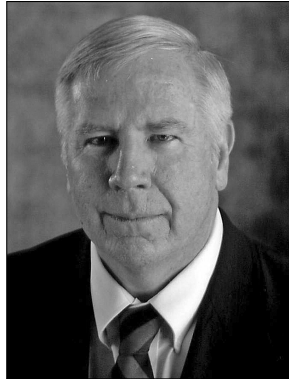
Thank you, again, for affording me the high honor and great privilege of serving as your AJA president, your “man in the arena” this year. Time is flying by, and soon I’ll be “passing the gavel” to president-elect Russ Otter at our annual conference in Toronto, September 25-30. Judge Otter, Judge Catherine Carlson, Judge Richard Kayne, and the entire conference committee have been working hard on conference planning. Yet again, our AJA members have produced a high-quality educational program and combined it with just the right mix of social activities to create many opportunities for networking with AJA colleagues and our Canadian judges. If you haven’t already signed up, please visit our website, <http://www.amjudges.org/conferences/>, download the educational program, and see for yourself! You can also register for the conference online and take advantage of the favorable exchange rate! AJA welcomes one and all to join us in Toronto for a unique judicial learning experience at a beautiful venue.

Speaking of a unique judicial learning experience and a fun and rewarding time, I just returned from the National Association for Court Management (NACM) conference in Pittsburgh. I was especially pleased to see our own AJA treasurer and NACM board member, Kevin Burke, at the conference. He’s everywhere and is a great ambassador for AJA! NACM president Stephanie Hess was the picture of poise and professionalism as she heartily welcomed me and other justice partners to the conference. What a beautiful and impressive city!

Even more impressive was the level of dedication to learning and service to the profession exhibited by all of the NACM members! President-elect Scott Griffith led a timely and important discussion with Ohio Chief Justice Maureen O’Connor and Kentucky court administrative director Laurie Dudgeon on the work of the National Task Force on Fines, Fees, and Bail Practices. Congratulations, Scott! NACM is in good hands, and AJA wishes you well as you begin your presidency.

I had the opportunity to attend several of the NACM committee meetings as well. Assisted by the exceptional staff from the National Center for State Courts (NCSC), whose long-time professional Shelley Rockwell serves as AJA’s association manager, the NACM members worked through lengthy agendas focused on how to improve our court system and our system of justice.

I was privileged to meet with many of the representatives of our justice partners who had been invited to the NACM meeting. Mary McQueen, NCSC president, played a prominent role at the conference using her warmth, unique style, and breadth and depth of knowledge on so many issues important to state courts to contribute to many discussions and effectively engage those in attendance. NCSC staffed many of the conference committees and contributed much to the success of the conference! AJA is blessed to have a longstanding, close relationship with the National Center. In fact, Jesse Rutledge of NCSC will be on hand at our Toronto conference, just as he was at NACM’s, working behind the scenes to help everyone. Jesse, a native of Toronto, has kindly agreed to speak at our conference and give us a “virtual guided tour” of the programs and projects NCSC is working on for the betterment of all our state courts.



Last year, we were fortunate to partner with the National Association of State Judicial Educators (NASJE) and the State of Washington to host our Seattle AJA conference. All agree that the conference was a huge success, thanks in no small part to a grant from another of our justice partners, the State Justice Institute, led by its executive director, Jonathan Mattiello. Thanks, Jonathan. Unfortunately, this year’s NASJE conference is scheduled for the same time as our Toronto conference.

I met with NASJE president Margaret Allen at the NACM meeting in Pittsburgh. She and I were disappointed we could not attend each other’s conferences this year. We’ll work to coordinate our meeting schedules for next year. We value a continued strong relationship with NASJE. We learned a great deal about effective judicial education from NASJE last year in Seattle and hope to continue to closely collaborate with NASJE in the future.

Speaking of learning from our justice partners, what struck me the most at the NACM conference was the unselfish dedication and service of the NACM members. Many of our judges at times convey an attitude that judges are the center of attention and the main players in our court system and do not properly recognize and credit the contributions of our justice partners. While no one can dispute that judges are essential to a vibrant justice system, it’s especially enlightening to attend the national conferences of our justice partners, such as NACM,

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NASJE, and the Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA). The members of these and other groups (like the National Association of Court Reporters) really work hard to try to make our courts function more smoothly and help judges perform our role in the court system more efficiently and effectively. By working together with all of our justice partners, judges are better able to deliver timely and just decisions to all our citizens who depend on the judiciary to uphold their rights and enforce the rule of law. Please consider whether you do enough in your court to recognize and thank your court administrator, staff, attorneys, law clerks, minute clerks, docket clerks, court reporters, bailiffs, process servers, and the many administrative personnel who work behind the scenes to make our jobs as judges easier, safer, more effective, and more efficient.

The untimely recent deaths of the two bailiffs in St. Joseph, Michigan, are a stark reminder to all of us that we work in a stressful and sometimes dangerous profession. It is up to us as judges to adopt policies and procedures in our courts, with the help of our justice partners, to do our best to help ensure that the citizens who use our court services and the many men and women who work with us to help deliver "equal justice to all"

can meet in a safe and peaceful setting in our nation's courtrooms. Our deepest condolences to the families of the victims and our "court family" in Michigan.

Shortly after the deadline for this column, I will have traveled to visit with more of our justice partners at the joint meeting of the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and COSCA. I hope to learn even more about the National Task Force on Fines, Fees, and Bail Practices. Those of you who were able to attend our Santa Fe midyear heard New Mexico Chief Justice Charles Daniels and New Mexico court administrator Artie Pepin speak on this issue. Artie is expected to participate in a discussion on the work of the task force at the CCJ/COSCA meeting. I look forward to learning more and, hopefully, will be in a position to pass some information along to you in Toronto. I would encourage a discussion of the work of the Task Force in a future issue of *Court Review*. Thanks to Steve Leben for his continued work as editor!

I look forward to seeing many of you in Toronto! Thanks to the executive committee, the board of governors, and all the members of our AJA committees whose hard work this past year has enriched my year and strengthened my resolve to continue to work with AJA in the judicial "arena" we all so love!