



From the President

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A collaborative effort: Promises made and kept

As I near the end of my term, I want to review some of the changes in our association during the past year and thank the people who made them possible.

We started the year with a meeting between Stuart Zanville, Cindy Cantu and me. We went over my wish list of dozens of items from the very far-fetched to the less far-fetched to the fetching. My goal was to increase membership, diversity and, especially, to enhance participation by our rank and file membership. To the extent that there was a perception of elitism, deserved or not, I wanted us to do what we could to lessen that perception. As a result of those efforts we opened up suggestions for trial lawyer of the year to the entire membership on the Web site; we solicited nominations for the executive board office of secretary from the entire membership and, above all, we enhanced new member recruitment and involvement.

We are currently on track to add nearly 600 new members this year (a record and nearly a 50 percent increase from last year) – skewed a great deal toward younger lawyers. Thanks go to Jeff Rudman and Liz Hagan for heading up this effort.

In addition, Liz has also implemented an initial, cost-effective survey to learn more about our members and their needs and how we can better tailor CAALA benefits to the changing demographics of our membership.

The new lawyers' program has been especially successful. Thanks go to Ronni Whitehead and Bill Karns for a great job. They introduced a "new lawyer" listserv and a New Lawyer Resource Library on the Web site with sample documents for young lawyers. There are now ten New Lawyer roundtable discussions per year; two of which are led by a judge. Jeff

Rudman put together the closing argument library with transcripts from over 20 trial-lawyers-of-the-year winners and nominees. Participation by new lawyers has doubled this year alone. The mixers are more popular than ever.

We had our first board retreat in four years. We all agreed to keep it local, short and focused. Cindy organized our brainstorming session with a musical table routine which proved very effective for gathering a great mix of ideas. Forty board members and six staff attended to create a strategic plan for CAALA's future.

Early in the year, Cindy, Jill McDonnell and I met to go over the Las Vegas convention. We established the CAALA ambassador program so that newer lawyers could be greeted by established members; we were trying to break down any intimidation that younger and newer members felt being among all of our more well-known and successful members. We also worked on enhancing the interactive nature of the educational programs. One result: questions from the audience could be electronically forwarded to the moderator of the program and the moderator worked with the panelists to make the programs more of a group discussion.

Las Vegas set a record for registration this year of 1800 attorneys. The education seminars were packed. All of the feedback from attendees was more positive than ever. The vendor booths sold out in 39 days thanks to Kwedi Gipson, the enforcer. The vendors reported their best year ever and are enthusiastic about next year.

The town hall meeting, with a panel including Judge Carolyn Kuhl, AAJ President Gary Paul, CAOC President John Montevideo and me, had a terrific turnout. Dave Hoffman and Mike Alder

circulated in the audience with a microphone and we encouraged attendees to offer up their comments and questions; another part of the effort to make the convention interactive.

Revenue from the convention, both gross and net exceeded both last year's amounts and the budget projection. The numbers are still being calculated, but it appears that we can finally start putting money back into our reserves.

We also have significantly increased our revenue from sponsors, exhibitors and advertisers at ongoing education events, mixers, board meetings and the Advocate. Bill Smith has come on board full-time as accounting manager to keep a closer eye on our financials.

This year we also added the staff position of online communications manager. Ryan Matteson has improved our Web site appearance, content and e-mail communication capability. There are, for example, about 1000 past Advocate articles on 85 different subjects available now on the site.

CAALA's popularity and its impact on plaintiff attorneys are at a high. Thirteen applications to join the CAALA Board of Governors have come from some very qualified and accomplished attorneys. Our association's future leadership moves up from the board of governors to the secretary's position on the executive board and, five years after that, to the presidency. Young and dynamic board members are the key to a continued source of top leadership.

Finally, what I have learned in these six years on the executive board is that running CAALA is definitely a collaborative process. No one person leads alone. Effective leadership really depends on constant interaction between our dedicated staff, the executive board, the board of governors and the broader membership.