

# Lawyers and Judges Together



Thomas J. Ryan

*"There is one universal law that has been formed, or at least adopted... by the majority of mankind. That law is justice. Justice forms the cornerstone of each nation's law."*

Alexis DeTocqueville,  
*Democracy in America*, 1835

Even though the law has changed significantly since DeTocqueville's time, the importance of justice in a free society has not changed. Justice that comes from the administration of our laws is the vital underpinning of free enterprise and our free society.

Recognizing this, recently more than 200 judges and lawyers from all over Michigan came together to discuss issues and initiatives for statewide improvements. This third annual conference was appropriately titled: "2001—A Court Odyssey. Effective Practices for the New Millennium."

Some of the highlights of this important, productive meeting were printed in last month's *Bar Journal* as participant comments in the "Speaking Out" column. A review of these ideas provides a good flavor for what

was discussed and what can be accomplished by such conferences.

As a participant, it was easy to be convinced that this conference was the start of many important coming changes. Yet, a continuation of this process itself is even more important than the substantive changes that will trace their roots back to this year's gathering.

Judges and lawyers *together* have a special duty to the society we serve to maintain the viability and relevance of our system of justice. As guardians of these vital institutions, we alone are in the best position to make the adaptations nec-

essary to meet the challenges of an ever-changing, fast-paced world. Justice and the very tangible benefits it can provide demands of us nothing less.

During this conference, it occurred to me that the participation of all 33,000 Michigan lawyers could make it even better. Of course, this is a logistical impossibility. However, it does reveal the value of replicating similar conferences in and for every circuit in our state.

These circuit conferences of judges and lawyers could address the local issues that are every bit as important in the administration of our laws. No one knows better the strengths and weaknesses of their particular

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system, from the physical court facilities to personnel issues to procedures, that may impede or enhance access to the quality of what DeTocqueville viewed as justice.

From this, I am convinced that there can grow the sort of dialogue that is a crucial part of the vigilance necessary to attain the lofty goals we have for our profession. We cannot expect to keep the peace, allow redress of grievances, or smooth the way for commerce

unless we can deliver the means for fair and efficient resolution of disputes that will inevitably arise.

By establishing such regular local conferences, judges and lawyers in each circuit court ensure the continuing and focused effort necessary to keep the courts and their support systems relevant to the real world. And this process would likely step up the innovations that have and can serve as models for change throughout the state.

As a profession, we are at our best when lawyers and judges are working together to improve "the system."

*"The attainment of justice is the highest human endeavor."*

Florence Ellinwood Allen (one of the 50 most influential women in American law)

## Legal Services Corporation Update, Part Two

Recently a group of Michigan lawyers traveled to Portsmouth, New Hampshire to meet with the Legal Services Corporation Board. The purpose of this conference was a review of the configuration and plans for consolidation of legal services programs in Michigan. As I stated in my last column, the LSC is targeting the consolidation of programs to provide economies of scale and improve the efficiency of legal services for the

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indigent. As a part of this process, we learned that there were differences among the Michigan lawyers about how the consolidation or reconfiguration should occur. So we were able to all agree with the LSC on a one-year extension of the reconfiguration/consolidation until January 2003.

This should give all of us in Michigan the time and opportunity to work together on a plan to reform the providing of legal services to indigent clients in our state so they get the best possible legal services. Though there may be inevitable and honest differences of opinion, all the parties are committed to working together to fulfill our obligations.

On behalf of the State Bar of Michigan, I have pledged its continuing support and cooperation in this effort. I particularly appreciate the attitude and dedication of all LSC providers in our state. Together I am convinced that we can come up with the best possible method to provide these services within the constraints and guidelines of the LSC. ♦

