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PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

In a time of great uncertainty, community strengthens us

By Michael Reedy

For most of the last two decades, I have been a member of the Honorable William A. Ingram American Inn of Court, in San Jose. The Ingram Inn is one of nearly 400 chartered Inns in the American Inns of Court. I belong to the AIC because its core values emphasize ethics, civility, and professionalism.

I recently discovered how inspiring these values can be during the uncertain times we now face. Because of shelter-in-place orders in Santa Clara County, the Ingram Inn had to cancel meetings that were scheduled for March and April. They were the only meetings we cancelled while I have been a member.

For the last two years, I have served as president of the Ingram Inn. We normally hold our final meeting of the year as a celebration dinner in May. We obviously could not have a dinner meeting this year, so we did the next best thing.

We invited a group of like-minded friends to join us: members of the Congressman Don Edwards Bankruptcy Inn of Court, also located in Santa Clara County, and members of our own Inn, including many local judges and attorneys, as well as law professors and students from Santa Clara, Stanford, and the Lincoln Law

School in downtown San Jose.

We asked them to think about how the COVID-19 crisis has affected their workplace or courtroom, and what changes they expect over the next six months. We wanted to hear from as many voices as possible. We scheduled our meeting to take place as a Zoom conference with a discussion about what we are going through and how we are adapting.

It turned out to be a great success, both encouraging and inspiring. We had nine different judges speak, including two from the civil division, one from criminal, two from the bankruptcy courts, two from the appellate court, one from the San Jose division of the federal court, and one from mediation/arbitration group. We learned how the courts are preparing to re-open, to hold video hearings, to process a backlog of criminal cases, and to prepare for many bankruptcy filings.

We heard from nine lawyers, including a prosecutor, criminal defense attorneys, bankruptcy attorneys, civil attorneys, and County Counsel. We learned how attorneys on both sides worked together to reduce the prison population, how clients in Asia are handling the pandemic, how a new law in the Bankruptcy Code will help small businesses, and how everyone is facing new challenges on a daily basis.

Law professors and deans from each of our law schools spoke about how quickly they had to adapt after shelter in place orders were issued, and how they are preparing for the next academic year. Several law students spoke about how fast their world changed after spring break this year, how difficult it is not to graduate in person or to take the Bar Exam as scheduled or to have a job lined up.

In total, 25 people spoke, and more than 80 people participated in the meeting. It was scheduled to last for 90 minutes but went two hours. Most everyone stayed with the meeting until it ended. Although our speakers were limited to three or four minutes each, I learned something from everyone who spoke.

Most importantly, we felt a sense of camaraderie and compassion. We are in this crisis together, we can learn from each other, and we can support each other. I have never before participated in an exchange with so many different people, so many different practices, so many different courtrooms, all part of the same legal community. We saw and felt the range of our community, and it strengthened every one of us.

We received a number of emails thanking us for the program, but this response from one of our judges best captures what people described: "About

last night's meeting and the circumstances under which it was held, I can honestly say it was one of the best meetings I have been a part of during my lengthy time with the Inn. It showed the collegiality and collaborative spirit of our legal community and that we are all in this together."

Whether you belong to an American Inn of Court or some other professional organization, I encourage each of you to find a way to communicate what you are experiencing during this time of crisis with other lawyers, judges, and law students. Find a way to bring different voices together, to listen to each other, to learn. As you support each other, our community grows in strength. We can and we will survive, together. ■

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