

RAM 2004-2005 Annual Report

The Referees' Association of Michigan continues to grow in size and stature. In terms of physical size, RAM has added seven new referees to its roster since last year, bringing the total (at the time of drafting this document) to 85 referees. In terms of stature, RAM members currently participate on numerous statewide committees, including the SCAO Juvenile Court Forms Revision Workgroup, the Child Support Guideline Committee, the State Bar Ethics Committee, and the State Bar Family Law Section. The importance of our organization has been validated by the caliber of individuals participating at our conferences, including both the current and past Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court. Our organization has also been recognized by the state legislature and Governor Granholm, when, on April 15, 2004, May was officially declared "Referee Appreciation Month."

Every year offers new challenges, and this year they have included the revision of MCR 3.215 as well as the apparent elimination of the Supreme Court Joint Rules Committee (which included a referee). Two RAM members (Sherbow and Randall) went before the Supreme Court to express RAM's opposition to amending portions of MCR 3.215. The verdict is still out on the meaning of the elimination of referees from the Joint Rules Committee, pending comments by Chief Justice Clifford Taylor at our conference. Ongoing concerns for FOC referees include a burdensome computer system and a complicated medical provision contained in the latest version of the child support formula. Finally, one potential problem on the horizon for FOC referees is funding. In March 2005, Governor Granholm mandated that statewide FOC budgets be trimmed immediately by \$3.3 million. In the future there may have to be additional cuts.

2005 witnessed RAM's induction into cyberspace. On March 17, 2005, RAM's web page, **Referees-Association.org**, officially went "live." The site will become more valuable with time as referees rely on it for communication. Currently, the site provides for group email, issues of our quarterly newsletter, *RAMblin' On*, board minutes, position letters, and registration and membership forms. **Referees-Association.org** will constantly evolve to stay current with information and the needs of RAM members. Future development will include a RAM directory, salary surveys, and apparel shopping opportunities. In the first twenty-eight days of operation, the site was visited 640 times, and referees sent 45 group email messages.

The creation of a web site was inspired, in part, by information gleaned from the Bar Leadership Forum in June 2004. Every Bar Association but one reported declining attendance at conferences, as well as a decrease in membership and participation. It was the consensus of the Bar presidents that demographics are changing: a clear social trend that requires groups, such as RAM, to provide to their members alternative methods of

communication, immediate access to relevant information, and a feeling to members that they belong and are empowered by a larger group. There is also a need to reward members for their participation. Consequently, in 2005, RAM is providing its first ever registration gift, a quality nylon tote bag with RAM logo, as well as a RAM logo pen. Conference attendees will also note that their years of membership (divisible by five) have been acknowledged with a RAM certificate.

In terms of personnel, this past year witnessed a “changing of the guard.” David Ellias retired from the Executive Board after ten years service as treasurer. In recognition of his tenure, David was awarded a plaque in front of his fellow referees during a November MJI seminar at the Michigan Hall of Justice in Lansing. Immediately thereafter, Deb McNabb was presented with a laser engraved plaque in recognition of her outstanding leadership as RAM president.

One ongoing project that will soon be completed is the establishment of a scholarship at Wayne State University Law School in the name of Philip Ingraham, a '66 graduate of WSU and former RAM president. RAM has pledged \$1,000.00 to Phil's alma mater, which will be distributed periodically to book award winners in an introductory family law class. Talks are currently underway with the school's administration and the Ingraham family.

Many of you may have probably read Steven Covey's book, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. One of the phrases for which he is known is, “You should never be too busy sawing to stop and sharpen the saw.” The RAM executive board has never been as busy as it is now. We are involved in so many different projects, in addition to our busy day jobs; we rarely find time to calmly consider, what is the future for RAM? One of the more gratifying moments of the year was the large turnout at RAM's Christmas/Holiday lunch at the Common Grill in Chelsea, Michigan. Nineteen referees showed up for the meeting, or more probably, the camaraderie. It struck me then, as it has in the past, what a talented and affable group we have. We are an association comprised of many knowledgeable and motivated individuals from across the state who have literally dedicated years of their lives to become excellent referees. Clearly, RAM's future is bright.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ken Randall
RAM President

April 28, 2005