

Trial Court Administrator, Todd Nuccio - ABA Judicial Division Lawyers Conference Burnham "Hod" Greeley Award Acceptance Speech

As prepared for delivery

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As a native Chicagoan, I always welcome an opportunity to come back home. The temperature and the walk over here this morning may have changed my mind. I had forgotten how cold it can get.

Well, besides not believing I could be deemed worthy of any particular recognition, my wife thinks I am obviously up to something else for traveling here under these conditions. I tried to explain to her that this was a MAJOR award and that any day, we would be receiving a large crate marked FRAGILE (pronounced like in the movie) with a beautiful leg lamp inside.

So, I hope you'll be able to make that happen for me by the time I return home.

In all seriousness, though, I am truly honored to receive the 2014 Burnham "Hod" Greeley Award.

Building public trust and confidence in our judicial system has been a long-standing mission of mine. The words "Building Public Trust and Confidence" are even incorporated as part of the tagline we affix to the signature of all communications from the members of our organization. So, it is greatly satisfying to be recognized for playing some part in helping to accomplish this objective; especially by a national organization as prestigious as the ABA.

It's unfortunate that little time and attention is given within our schools or broader society to learning about the organization, role and responsibilities of our judicial system.

Today, the importance of the rule of law and a fair and impartial judiciary simply are not topics of interest for many Americans. What information citizens do receive about our legal system comes from television shows, media opinion, and other sources that lack an objective perspective.

Often, our courts end up being defined by those who depict a brand of justice far from reality. This leads to misunderstanding about our court system and unrealistic expectations for what it can achieve. When these misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations are carried into the legislative realm, the independence and support for our courts are put at risk.

As you probably know, judges and court officials can only do so much to confront these challenges. First, we are busy carrying out the system's mission on a daily basis and have limited time to reach out. Second, our attempts at advocacy are often viewed with self-interest and, therefore, carry less weight. As such, the outside and informed backing of the ABA and other organizations is critical.

I am particularly excited about the potential of an organization that I helped launch a few years ago. The organization is called Justice Initiatives or JI as it has come to be referenced. JI provides that missing objective and independent voice for our judicial system by educating, advocating, supporting and advancing the needs and interests of our courts.

It's a non-profit comprised of local civic leaders, lawyers, business owners and concerned citizens in North Carolina who understand the rule of law is the bedrock of our civilized society and that a healthy court system is critical to safeguarding this foundation.

They have been successful at personalizing the messaging by demonstrating the inextricable connection between each individual's quality of life and the courts ability to fairly and impartially administer justice. They have also been able to convey to the business sector that a healthy court system is essential to a strong and prosperous economic environment.

It's a grassroots effort that attacks the problem from the bottom up rather than the traditional top down approach. We're seeing good success in the ability to mobilize support from the business and other community sectors and to transform that support into influence with our local legislators.

If every judicial district had a Justice initiatives and was communicating the same message, the impact could be transformative. For this reason, we are now in the process of examining how to expand the organization to other parts of NC in partnership with our various law schools. I would welcome the opportunity to speak more about this initiative at some other point with anyone who might be interested.

Let me just say in closing that this is an award to be shared with every member of the Judiciary and Trial Court Administrator's Office in Charlotte. It is only through their dedication and commitment to that public trust and confidence mission that we have been able to develop and offer the leading programs and services that have been noted. So, I humbly accept on their behalf.

Thank you Professor Dubay and Judge Hassell for nominating me and thank you to the committee members for selecting me. I am truly honored to be among the distinguished group that have preceded me. Thank you again.