Looking Back on 25 Years of Court Manager

By Andra Motyka

This is the Silver Anniversary edition of Court Manager. In keeping with such celebratory events, I asked the past editors of Court Manager if they would share some thoughts with you about the progression of the magazine and/or court management generally. So, here’s what they had to say:
I see a lot of intellectual production that not only captures the best thinking of innovative and creative court managers across the nation, but that challenges us all to find new ways of enhancing access to justice.

JACK CLARKE  
Editor, Premiere Issue  
(October 1985) – Winter 1988

Thanks for the opportunity to reminisce and talk about the early days of NACM and Court Manager.

When the National Association for Court Management was created, I believed, as did many, that court management was becoming a profession. That is, a practice of management distinct from the management of other kinds of organizations, private or public, and — and this is the crucial distinction — one that had its own specialized body of knowledge.

I saw that body of knowledge developing out of the work and the writings of Ed McConnell, Ernie Friesen, Ed Gallas, Maureen and Harvey Solomon, and others. I knew it would continue to develop. But I also knew that to develop, it would need a medium. In those days, before the Internet, blogs, email, etc., that meant two things: conferences, where people would meet face to face to exchange ideas, and newsletters, where innovators would refine their ideas and spread them around in black and white.

I know that our ambitions for a specialized body of knowledge have been fulfilled. I look at the work done for NACM by Geoff Gallas and Frank Broccolina and a host of others on the core competencies. I see the ICM offerings expanding and becoming more rigorous and sophisticated. I look at the incredible amount of useful information you can find at the National Center for State Courts’ website. I look at how Barry Mahoney has deepened our understanding of courts through his work. And I see new forms of communication, such as Ingo Keilitz’s blog, and I hear that Alex Aikman’s Think Out Loud blog will be back soon.

I see a lot of intellectual production that not only captures the best thinking of innovative and creative court managers across the nation, but that challenges us all to find new ways of enhancing access to justice.

As to Court Manager itself, I think that the editors who have followed me have fulfilled those long-ago ambitions. Important, insightful, challenging writing by Ernie Friesen, John Greacen, Roger Hartley, John Martin, Marcus Reinkensmeyer, Brian Ostrom, Dan Straub, Robert Tobin, Brenda Wagenknecht-Ivey, and others. They have challenged us to think differently about a dizzyingly wide array of important issues — not only our day-to-day core work (like caseflow management and what it means to be a court manager), but also topics that have yet to penetrate most of our consciousnesses but will become crucial to our work in the future. I’m thinking here about John Martin’s work on the impacts of cultural differences, Roger Hartley’s thinking about the future of court budgeting, and the work that Bryan Borys has helped us do on alternative service delivery strategies.

People can debate whether court management is truly a distinctive profession. I have no doubt that there is a body of knowledge without which any court manager cannot adequately do his or her job. You need to understand a broad and complex array of disciplines and pursuits to succeed in an endeavor as complicated as court management. Much of that knowledge you can find in the pages of Court Manager.
We are reminded how fortunate we are to work in the courts or to be consulting to the courts. It is a noble calling and a rewarding profession.

MARK ZAFFARANO
Editor
Vol. 3, No. 3 (Summer 1988) — Vol. 5, No. 3 (Summer 1990)

As a former editor of Court Manager, I appreciate the opportunity to make a few observations to share with my colleagues. First, I want to thank Andra for continuing to make this publication so worthwhile to read and applaud her for her dedicated contribution to our field of court management. When you see Andra at the annual conference, please give her your comments or email her whenever you have time with your suggestions.

I have read the latest issue of Court Manager, and the articles continue to be interesting and useful for our profession. As a great believer in the critical importance of active leadership, I enjoyed reading Dan Straub’s article.

Second, when you receive Court Manager, please allow yourself to take a few minutes from your hectic day and devote some time to thinking about the articles. This publication affords us the immediate reminder to think globally about our profession before we plunge right back into our daily grind of addressing budget issues and countless organizational problems.

Third, it is hard to believe we are celebrating the 25th year of Court Manager. We are reminded how fortunate we are to work in the courts or to be consulting to the courts. It is a noble calling and a rewarding profession. Conducting effective court research and producing timely articles takes significant time and effort, too. We should never take for granted the future shelf life of Court Manager. Let’s work hard to keep it going for the next 25 years!
When Andra asked me to write something in commemoration of Court Manager’s 25th anniversary, I knew right where to look. I have almost a complete set of CMs, from the beginning, in a box in my basement. I even have copies of CM’s predecessor publication — The Court Management Journal — which was published annually from 1981 to 1985.

The first thing you should know is that Anne Kelly of NCSC was the managing editor during my term of service. She was very adept at taking all the information and articles I sent her and organizing them into a coherent issue.

How much has CM changed since my time as editor from 1990–1995?

The cover and pages today are much more polished in appearance, with increased use of color. Back then, we used photos of members’ courthouses on the cover, then we started moving toward more topical art and photos relevant to the content or theme of a particular issue.

As to content, I am proud to observe that much of what we started in the early ’90s survives today. Columns such as “Washington Review” (begun in 1992 – Tom Henderson), “Jury News” (1994 – Tom Munsterman), and “A Question of Ethics” (1994 – Pete Kiefer) are still regular features. (The columnists have changed over time, except Pete Kiefer, who deserves a medal for length of service.)

The sources for articles are also pretty much the same: a mixture of
Getting to know so many influential, creative, and thoughtful people in the justice business contributed greatly to my personal growth and no doubt had an effect on the performance of my court, Superior Court of Delaware.

I usually found the articles written by my court administrator colleagues to be the most compelling and always wished that they would submit more. I regarded this as a reflection of how busy our members were but never stopped pestering them to write. Nial Raaen comes to mine as a dependable and enthusiastic contributor.

Knowing that most of the submissions for the Justice Achievement Award came directly from our member courts, I came to view the individual project summaries submitted for the JAA as mini articles. They were another way for members to tell their stories and were chock-full of innovative ideas.

One thing that is clearly new is the coverage of NACM members’ activities internationally. I loved the article last year (also written by Pete Kiefer) about NACM’s assistance in Russia, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Liberia, and Serbia.

Another indication of how much has changed: In my last issue — Summer 1995 — I included the following message:

Attention Internet Users: NACM is promoting the use of Internet E-mail to facilitate communication among the membership. If you have Internet access, send a brief message to akelly@ncsc.dni.us. Be sure to include your internet address in the message. (This was followed by a list of 22 court administrators and 21 NCSC staff members whose email addresses we had already identified.)

project reports and articles written by NCSC staff members (Ingo Keilitz), speakers at NACM conferences (Ron Stupak), academics, and frontline court administrators.

Vol. 9, No. 1 – Winter 1994
Editor Ralston debuts “A Question of Ethics,” written by Peter Kiefer. His first scenario features a court administrator who faces a reporter’s questions regarding travel expenses.

Vol. 9, No. 3 – Summer 1994
“Jury News” is introduced, with Tom Munsterman presiding. Tom tackles one day/one trial and non-responders in his inaugural column.

Vol. 10, No. 4 – Fall 1995
Kent Batty becomes editor. This conference issue looks at “A Decade of Excellence, A Future of Opportunity.”
People and organizations wanted me to know what they were up to — some invited me to visit their courthouses or attend their conferences. I traveled a lot while editor.

We didn’t have any survey data as to who was actually reading CM, and I was always curious to know if anyone was reading my column. In one issue, I asked that anyone who read my column call me or send me a note to let me know. I heard from about five people. Again, I figured everyone was just too busy and concluded that for every person who responded, there were 100 others who read the column but were too busy to call. So let’s try again. If you read this article, send me a note at tralston@ycst.com.

Serving as editor of CM for 20 issues was a great personal experience. People and organizations wanted me to know what they were up to — some invited me to visit their courthouses or attend their conferences.

One more personal note. For my last issue of CM, I asserted the editor’s prerogative and published a picture of my courthouse on the cover. Several years later, when I left superior court, I started working for a law firm in an office building across the street. A year after that, a new courthouse opened in Wilmington, and the old courthouse was sold. Most recently it was sold to a local developer who will be converting the courthouse into office space. In two years, the sole tenant of the courthouse will be my law firm.

Vol. 11, No. 1 – Winter 1996
CM cover design changes. Topics include court facility financing, pro se initiatives, and automation contract negotiations.

Vol. 12, No. 1 – Winter 1997
Changed inside look of CM; added more graphic elements.

Vol. 13, No. 2/3 – 1998
Introduced “arrow” design on cover. Topics included mediation, collections, and restorative justice.
It’s a different court admin world since I was editor of Court Manager 15 years ago. The profession seems to have grown less mobile, probably as a result of, among other things, “age and stage” issues — maturing individuals with two-income families, for example; cyclical periods of economic uncertainty; and the natural slowing of the growth in a number of positions. It appears as though court managers are staying put in the same jurisdiction or state. (The feds, of course, seem to be an exception.) With few exceptions, good jobs don’t appear to be attracting the same breadth of applicants as was the case in the ‘90s.

While I must acknowledge a personal bias, having made two significant relocations in my own career, generally speaking, the lack of mobility seems not to be a good thing. It may limit the cross-pollination of ideas that comes from courts being exposed by their administrators to different perspectives on how the business of the courts could be conducted. The lack of much movement by court administrators, particularly across state lines, means that courts may become “inbred” in their practices and perspectives and unable to honor and absorb perspectives and ideas that might come from other jurisdictions.

Of course, I see it as a significant purpose, and accomplishment, of NACM and its conferences to promote the cross-pollination of ideas. The growth in stature of the regional conferences, which began in 1993, and the significant accomplishments of our members represented in the mini

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guides and other special publications that spread ideas across the courts, are testimony to NACM's efforts to provide the cross-pollination that may have suffered from the profession's lack of mobility. We should celebrate the efforts of the association's leaders of the last decade and a half for pushing us forward toward a brighter future for courts.

JOI SORENSEN
Editor

I thoroughly enjoyed my term as editor of Court Manager and the opportunities it afforded to work with so many talented members of our profession. Over the past eight years, I have noted with appreciation, and pleasure, the high quality achieved by Marcus and Andra. I especially note the improved graphics and other visual inclusions. The quality of the articles and columns continues to justify the Court Manager's reputation as the premiere journal of our profession.
From my perspective, these contributors have brought fresh perspectives and new opportunities for collaboration with the field of court management.

MARCUS REINKENSMeyer
Editor

During my tenure as editor of Court Manager — from 2001 to 2005 — I noted a strong emphasis on articles addressing leadership and professional development of court managers, court technologies, and business continuity/security planning. The NACM Core Competencies Guidelines were published in 2003 (Vol. 18, Issue 2), giving rise to numerous follow-up articles on educational programs and implementation of the guidelines.

During this period, nearly every publication of Court Manager addressed the great promise of court technologies, ranging from e-filing to distance learning to integrated criminal justice systems. Through collaboration with the Forum on the Advancement of Court Technology (FACT), NACM established a standing column in Court Manager — “Technology Facts” — with timely contributions from public/private sector experts in the field.

Two other changes are noteworthy for this era. First, in terms of packaging and presentation, we introduced more extensive use of photographs (increasingly, with the display of digital images), supporting charts, and graphics in Court Manager. Secondly, we received a growing number of articles contributed by “friends of court management,” as opposed to incumbent clerks and court administrators. Specifically, we were fortunate enough to publish timely articles from judges, professors, national researchers, and other professional organizations dedicated to improvements in the administration of justice. From my perspective, these contributors have brought fresh perspectives and new opportunities for collaboration with the field of court management. This positive trend seems to be continuing with recent articles addressing courthouse architecture, cultural competency, procedural fairness, etc. Current and future generations of court managers are enriched by this cross-disciplinary sharing of information and resulting synergies.

Vol. 20, No. 1 – 2005
It’s the 20th anniversary of NACM and CM. Issue looks at unequal treatment in the justice system, court cultures, and courthouse security.

Vol. 20, No. 2 – 2005
Technology FACTs, a column by members of the Forum on the Advancement of Court Technology (FACT), debuts.

Vol. 20, No. 4 – 2005
Andra Motyka becomes editor.
Applause and kudos to our regular columnists; they share their particular expertise with us in each and every edition.

“You have to know the past to understand the present.”

Dr. Carl Sagan