The DR Section Spring Conference: Unforgettable Experiences, Learning Opportunities, and Lifelong Connections

Our newsletter editors reached out to several regular conference attendees to learn why they attend the spring conference every year. Learn about why the ABA DR Section spring conference is a must-attend event for these professionals.

Adam Martin

I first attended the DR Section Spring Conference as a law student. I was thrilled to have the opportunity to learn from experienced practitioners about topics that I found (and still find) fascinating. I attended various sessions through the Conference, which were a great way to learn practical skills and new trends in ADR. The most valuable part of the conference to me, however, was the community itself. I was one of the most inexperienced attendees, but everyone there was more than happy to share advice and encouragement. My experience at the Spring Conference made me feel like I was part of a group that would always strive to support innovation and help to develop young practitioners. I don’t think I would still be as involved with the Section as I am without the encouragement and sense of collegiality I found at the Spring Conference. For anyone who wants to become more involved in ADR, I couldn’t recommend it more; you’ll find a passionate group of people who will help you find your niche in the practice. For those more experienced, it’s an excellent opportunity to give back to the community and to learn from an incredibly talented and diverse group of peers. The Spring Conference is one of the most influential and entertaining events of my career.

Adam R. Martin is an Associate in the Trial and Dispute Resolution practice group at Pepper Hamilton LLP. He also serves as Co-Chair of the DR Section podcast committee and as a board member and volunteer mediator with Neighborhood Dispute Settlement in Harrisburg, PA.

Theodore K. Cheng

As one of the largest ADR-related conferences in the world (if not the largest), I always look forward to attending the ABA DRS Spring Conference. I believe it is an unparalleled opportunity to network with and learn from both experts and peers in the ADR field from around the world. Through the conferences, I have had the opportunity to learn from so many of the noted giants and leaders in and outside the field, who have increased both my knowledge about and skills in ADR processes and inspired me to continue working to hone my craft. I also appreciate that it is one of the most diverse gatherings of ADR professionals, ranging from neutrals who practice in all types
and areas of ADR, to academics, judges and court staff, ADR providers and administrators, community advocates, and other stakeholders in the ADR field. They cut across racial, gender, socio-economic, and other categories such that the discussions and exchange of ideas are both robust and inclusive. I additionally find it extremely helpful to meet and speak with the vendors and exhibitors through whom I learn about updates on technological and other innovations in the field that I might consider incorporating into my practice. I have particularly treasured the many relationships I’ve made over the years attending the conferences, including making new friendships and finding mentors and sponsors. For me, the ABA DRS Spring Conference has provided so much valuable advice and insights over the years about practicing as a neutral, being a thought leader in the field, and otherwise contributing to my and others’ professional development. I look forward to attending the conference each year.

*Theo Cheng* is an independent, full-time arbitrator and mediator, focusing on commercial, intellectual property (IP), technology, entertainment, and labor/employment disputes. Mr. Cheng has been appointed to the rosters of the American Arbitration Association (AAA), the CPR Institute, Resolute Systems, and the Silicon Valley Arbitration & Mediation Center’s List of the World’s Leading Technology Neutrals.

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Susan Guthrie

Every year the ABA Section of Dispute Resolution’s Spring Conference is at the top of my “Do Not Miss” professional events, and the 2020 event in New Orleans is shaping up to be the most exciting conference in years! The Spring Conference annually draws several hundred ADR professionals from around the country and around the world and provides me with the chance to expand my network exponentially in a short period of time while hearing from some of the top dispute resolution professionals in the world in the programs and plenaries. Indeed, if there are any new and current trends in the profession, there is sure to be a program on that topic at this event. The Spring Conference is also where I have found my best opportunities to get more involved in the ABA and in the DR Section, from publishing articles to joining with colleagues to advance mediation and online dispute resolution. This year’s conference, combining the many benefits of the event with one of America’s most vibrant cities during the New Orleans Jazz Fest, well that truly is a “can’t miss” event. I look forward to seeing you there!

*Susan Guthrie* is the ABA Section of Dispute Resolution membership officer and mediation committee co-chair.

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Ana Sambold

Every year, I look forward to attending the ABA DR Section Annual Conference. The outstanding selection of programs are thought-provoking, energizing, engaging, and inspirational. I really enjoyed learning about new developments in ADR, best practices in other jurisdictions, hearing from leading and recognized experts, and exchanging ideas with like-minded professionals. Thanks to this conference, I have also made wonderful and dear friends from all over the world, friends that I consider my second family - my ADR family. We have helped each other professionally, visited each other’s hometown, attended each other’s weddings, shared family stories and seen our kids grow up. Each year, I’m thrilled to see them and spend time with them at the receptions, dine-arounds and exploring the city where the conference is taking place. I’ll always be grateful to the ABA DR Section for bringing us all together, and for promoting ADR and excellence in the profession. This conference is definitively one of the most enriching professional and personal experiences one might have. Don’t miss it. I look forward to seeing everyone in New Orleans!

Ana Sambold is a San Diego based Attorney, Mediator, and Arbitrator with over a decade of experience as a conflict resolution specialist. She has served as a neutral in over 1,000 cases across a broad spectrum of civil litigation matters and is on the neutral panels of the American Arbitration Association (AAA), ADR Services, Inc., and several U.S. courts, federal and state agencies.

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Susan M. Yates

Having attended every Spring Conference except the first, my experience has shifted over the years. The one constant is that I learn more in hallway conversations than I do in conference sessions. From the start, when I was in the “what is going on!?” phase, I began to meet people in the hallways who would become my national network of friends and colleagues.

Then came the “doing it all” phase. I participated in Council meetings, chaired committee meetings, facilitated forums, spoke on panels, both during the Court Mini-Conference and then during the main conference. The hallway discussions that were a continuing source of information also became friendly reunions.

Now I am in the “happy to help” phase. I review proposals when asked. I speak on panels when invited. I encourage people to present and to attend. I support my colleagues at Resolution Systems Institute and throughout the field when they present. I seek out people who are new to
the conference and try to help them feel welcome. I connect with the wonderful colleagues across the country and the world who have so inspired me over the years.

And I am still learning the most in the hallways.

Susan M. Yates is the Executive Director of Resolution Systems Institute. She can be reached at yates@AboutRSI.org.

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