From the Chair  By Harrie Samaras

In assuming the role of Dispute Resolution Section Chair, I know that I am following many impressive leaders with significant accomplishments. The past, Chairs have nurtured and grown the Section, from its start as a special committee of the ABA to the robust organization it is today, respected worldwide.

I bring the experience of neutral, advocate, and client to my tenure as Chair. For the past 18 years I have served as a commercial arbitrator and mediator in both US and international cases. I began my legal career as a patent examiner at the US Patent and Trademark Office and then spent five years at the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit as a staff attorney and then as a law clerk to Helen W. Nies, the court’s first female Chief Judge. I moved from private practice (where I focused on litigation) to the corporate world where, as a practical matter, I first became acquainted with dispute resolution while managing legal groups for two international companies. I quickly became a devotee. Indeed, my in-house experience was perhaps the single most important factor influencing me to establish a practice as a neutral.

My term begins with a fresh purpose emanating from the Section’s new long-range plan. In the simplest terms, the plan provides a framework and guidance to all levels of Section leadership for helping the Section thrive and grow and providing value to members. The plan lists five complementary areas in which the Section should excel: professional development, thought leadership, policy and practice, fellowship and outreach, and governance. I will be reporting on the Section’s work toward achieving these goals throughout my time as Chair, but they have already guided me in planning for the coming year. For example, increasing the Section’s reach both within and outside the United States will be a key focus. As one means of accomplishing international outreach, I have appointed as the Co-chairs of the International Committee Danny McFadden and Lucy Greenwood, two practitioners with significant experience in international mediation and arbitration. They will help strengthen existing connections and establish new ones in various regions of the world.

Likewise, in planning the 2019 Spring Conference themed “Shining the Light on Parties: Enhancing the Experience of ADR Users,” the Section is extending its outreach efforts to ensure that users of dispute resolution (for instance, outside and in-house counsel) participate as presenters and attendees at the conference. By focusing on the experience of users, we hope to give new understanding and perspectives to everyone at the conference, whether they are practitioners, parties, or other stakeholders in dispute resolution processes.

Also in line with the long-range plan, the Section has gotten off to a strong start this year in the areas of policymaking and thought leadership. The Section’s Women in Dispute Resolution Committee diligently developed Resolution 105 (and the accompanying report), urging providers of domestic and international dispute resolution to expand their rosters with diverse practitioners and encourage the selection of diverse neutrals. The resolution also urges users of domestic and international legal and neutral services to select and use diverse neutrals. The ABA House of Delegates recently unanimously adopted the resolution, and so now, working in and outside the ABA, the Section will begin implementing the policy embodied in Resolution 105.

Discussing plans for the year ahead would not be complete without mentioning the ABA’s new membership model. In addition to a simpler and more sensible pricing structure, the ABA is committed to providing members increased value. In this regard the Section will continue its long track record of providing high-quality in-person, on-demand, and electronic content to its members. We will also endeavor to create new and interesting content and deliver it in useful ways.

I look forward to working with all Section members and leaders to ensure that members receive no less than the value they deserve from our Section. And I thank Ben Davis, the Immediate Past Chair, for leaving the “house in order” and helping me assume the role of Chair. I hope to pay it forward.

Harrie Samaras is a full-time arbitrator and mediator. She is a frequent speaker on dispute resolution topics and the editor and an author of the book ADR Advocacy, Strategies, and Practices for Intellectual Property and Technology Cases (Second Edition), published by the ABA. She can be reached at hsamaras@comcast.net.