



Delegates at major partner, LawMaster's exhibition booth.



Delegates from Ellis Palmos & Co get the lowdown from Jennifer Fordham-Leppitsch of major partner Medelink International.

Victorian State Conference

20-21 May 2005

By John McPherson

The Australian Lawyers Alliance Victorian State Conference saw continuity in venue, if not in name, with the Cumberland at Lorne again hosting speakers and delegates. Once more, the resilience of passionate lawyers under siege was evident.

One hundred and eighteen delegates were in attendance this year, a number comparing well (albeit slightly down) with the 2004 conference.

Without sponsorship, the conference would not occur. Major sponsors Medelink International and LawMaster, together with ipac, Evidex, and Impact Funding, generously supported the event. On the Thursday evening before the conference, a number of Lawyers Alliance national staff, the State Committee and some interlopers had the pleasure of dining with sponsor representatives in a gesture of thanks.

Injured Victorians continue to suffer massive restrictions in common law rights, especially in public liability, medical negligence and like contexts, and the inevitable result of this has been that plaintiff lawyers' work has also diminished. Judge Bowman's quoting of Ted Hill, that legendary advocate for injured workers, 'you'll never beat the profession, son', was apposite and timely.

Timely, too, was the Court of Appeal's first decision concerning the proper interpretation of the still-newly restored right of 'seriously injured' workers to sue for damages in *Barwon Spinners*, delivered in late February.

Phil Misso confidently presented a paper titled 'How to succeed in a s134AB Serious Injury Application'. Judge Bowman spoke in a similar vein from the perspective of the Bench. Both talks prompted searching (and sometimes lengthy) questioning from the floor and animated discussions over tea and biscuits during breaks.

The prize for most provocative (and neologistic) paper must go to Paul Mulvaney for his discussion of the ethics of >>

Alex Watson of the conference committee chats to delegate Leon Ranieri (l) and speaker Anthony Hounslow (r).



costing; the expression 'squeal-point charging' has now entered the lexicon. In the same session, LIV CEO and long-term Alliance supporter John Cain explained how national uniformity in the regulation of the profession will affect fee-agreements.

The conference proper ran from Friday morning to Saturday afternoon, with the speakers and topics throughout of a uniformly high quality. Judge Bowman, one of the two keynote speakers, spoke carefully and frankly of his recent judicial experience in leave applications by injured workers, and everyone in attendance benefited, as too should their respective clients.

Stephen Kenny, former counsel to David Hicks and the other keynote speaker, gave a riveting address about the experience of acting for Mr Hicks, reminding delegates of the precarious nature of freedom in the 'greatest democracy on earth', and the palpably inadequate responses thus far from Australian officials to Mr Hicks' plight.

The rightfulness of the expansion of the Australian Lawyers Alliance charter beyond the interests of injured compensation and damages claimants would have been questioned by no one at the conclusion of Stephen's presentation.

A highlight of Friday's formal dinner was the presentation made by the Victorian membership to our outgoing President, Simon Garnett, and the welcome to the President-elect, Richard Morrow. Simon's detailed communications with the Victorian membership about the discharge of his

role was unprecedented, and his accessibility, diligence and huge devotion of time to the organisation during his time as President (delightfully parodied by Richard Morrow) will not be quickly forgotten.

Conference low-light was undoubtedly the tale of Jake Kilby's appearance at the hotel reception at 3:00am Friday, starkers, with a story about being locked out of his own room. Some versions of the tale have him clad in underpants, although the truth may well be lost in an alcoholic haze. Jake is apparently working on marketing underpants with pockets sufficient to accommodate hotel room keys prior to the next Australian Lawyers Alliance conference.

Sincere thanks are due to the Victorian conference organising committee Geraldine Collins, Clara Davies, Simon Garnett, Alex Watson and Peter Burt, as well as Kim Alderson, Alliance Conference Manager, and Eva Scheerlinck, Jake Kilby, and Gerry Ferretter from the Alliance's national office for their work in preparation and throughout the conference.

See you in May 2006! ■

John McPherson is a solicitor at Arnold Dallas McPherson, Bendigo, and an experienced conference-goer.

PHONE (03) 5445 9200 EMAIL johnm@ardmc.com.au

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