

# The American Inns of Court: A New Beginning

On Tuesday, February 12, at the Riverside Country Club the first meeting of an Inn of Court was hosted by the J Rueben Clark Law School. In attendance were Lawyers from the state of Utah, Judges from Utah, the Ninth and Tenth Circuits, faculty members from the J Rueben Clark Law School and students. The meeting was the culmination of several years of thought and planning.

The process leading to the establishment of the Inn was described by Judge J Clifford Wallace of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in an address given at the gathering. Judge Wallace had accompanied Chief Justice Warren Burger and others to England several years ago to observe the operation of the English Bench and Bar. Among the positive things observed there were the British Inns of Court. These Inns of Court bring together Judges and Lawyers in an atmosphere in which a free exchange of learning and insight can be made. Impressed by the professional atmosphere and dialogue, the Chief Justice asked Judge Wallace to spearhead a committee to examine the possibility of establishing a similar Inns of Court system in the United States.

After reflecting on the challenges involved with establishing an Inn of Court, Judge Wallace concluded it would be best if the Inn was established in conjunction with a law school. Over the next few years, Judge Wallace and Dean Lee discussed some of the challenges and pos-



JRCLS Dean Rex Lee



Judge A. Sherman Christensen

sibilities of developing such a system in the United States. Joining them was Judge A. Sherman Christensen, a Federal District Court Judge for Utah.

In late September SBA President Terry Turner appointed Bill Orton to head a three member ad hoc committee, which included law students Vaughn Crawford, Mike Eldredge, and Denver Snuffer, for the purpose of assisting in molding ideas into a viable program. The ad hoc committee, under the direction of Judge Christensen, drafted a charter, decided on membership, and with the financial assistance of the law school, conducted the first meeting of the Inn. The initial meeting a board of six benchers and a chief executive officer (treasurer) were elected, modeled after the traditional English system.

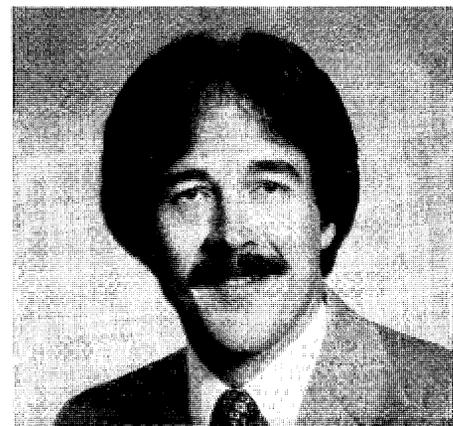
During the course of his remarks, Judge Wallace reminded those in attendance of the observation made by Chief Justice Burger about lawyer competency before Federal Courts. "It is hoped," said the Judge, "that this Inn of Court system, the prototype of which is being established here tonight, will contribute in a unique way to the education and training of practicing Lawyers and Judges. Traditional law school training, fraternities, and Continuing Education programs have proven inadequate. We hope to establish a new catalyst to fill in where a need currently exists."

Membership in the New Inn included a dozen experienced lawyers, a dozen young lawyers, a dozen law students, five judges, and three members of the law school faculty. Dean Lee spoke briefly and complimented Judge Christensen for his efforts and enthusiasm in planning the Inn of Court. "It was Judge Christensen more than any single other person who is responsible for this gathering," said the Dean, referring to the fact that Judge Christensen had the most significant input and foresight in bringing the Inn from the abstract to reality.

Judge Christensen, in his characteristic modesty, spoke briefly and insisted his contributions were minimal. Judge Christensen went on to say: "I hope those of you who are here catch the vision of what we are doing. If what we are about proves to be an effective mechanism for bettering lawyering skills, our program will be noticed and copied nationwide."

Interest in the Inn of Court runs all the way to Chief Justice Burger. The Inns of Court system, it is expected, will one day run nationally. Certainly there is no argument that improvement of a lawyer's advocative skills is a universal goal, supported by The Cranston Committee, the Devitt Report, the Chief Justice and the American Bar Association. The problem is conceded, the cure is what is wanted. The Inn's of Court may prove to be the cure.

The Inn established this month will meet monthly; at each gathering a discussion will be held on a specific subject. The March meeting, for example, will feature a *voir dire* conducted both under the federal procedures, utilizing the judge, and under state procedures, utilizing lawyers, to be followed by a discussion on the relative merits of each system. It is anticipated that the discussion will be lively with all present contributing. The strength of the Inn is in the interchange of ideas.



Bill Orton