The Editor interviews Homer C. La Rue and Marvin E. Johnson, who are neutrals with JAMS, The Resolution Experts.

Editor: Would each of you gentlemen provide our readers with something of your background and experience?

Homer C. La Rue: I am a graduate of the Cornell School of Industrial Relations and of Cornell Law School. I have been a law professor for the past 25 years, the last 10 of which I have been at Howard University School of Law. During all of this time I have been involved in the practice of arbitration and mediation, and various other ADR activities, in conjunction with my teaching.

Marvin E. Johnson: I have been in this field for over 25 years as well. My undergraduate degree and graduate degrees are from Kent State University and Wisconsin University are in international relations. At the Catholic University School of Law I have been in the area of employment law. For over 17 years I taught labor relations law and conflict resolution at Bowie State University in Maryland, where I created the first ADR center in the state university system. My law practice has been in the employment and labor law areas.

Editor: How did each of you become interested in ADR?

Homer C. La Rue: I had a familiarity with labor relations from a very early age because my father worked in a unionized environment and was active in the union. I wanted to learn more about labor negotiations and was interested in alternative methods of resolving labor-management disputes. In my view, ADR offered a sensible approach to managing conflict. At that time, industrial relations was one of the few avenues into the ADR field.

Marvin E. Johnson: My background parallels that of Marvin. I come from a working class family, and my father was a union member. At an early age I learned about labor strife and about strikes. In law school – after getting past the inevitable first year – I was a criminal defense attorney – I took a course in labor law and began to learn about arbitration and the very real benefits it offered. The more I learned, the more I came to believe that this area constituted a very worthwhile career path, one where it was possible to make a living and do some good.

Editor: Can you tell us of your ADR work at JAMS?

Homer C. La Rue: We are both recent arrivals at JAMS, and we both see it as an opportunity to expand and diversify our practices by resolving complex commercial and employment disputes.

Marvin E. Johnson: ACCESS ADR at JAMS is meant to foster relationships, this is extremely important. ACCESS ADR seeks to address the same issues in the ADR field. Without a variety of initiatives and the support of organizations like the ABA, the JAMS Foundation, and others, these important issues will remain unresolved.

La Rue: ACCESS ADR tries to do two things. First, it attempts to raise awareness of the mainstream users of ADR services that there is an issue – the one Marvin has just articulated – and second, it attempts to create a bridge which will connect the users with a group of practitioners to whom they have not been connected in the past. ACCESS ADR is meant to foster relationships. In a profession that relies upon relationships, this is extremely important.

Editor: Will you tell us what role the JAMS Foundation and the ABA Section of Dispute Resolution play in this project?

La Rue: About a year ago Marvin and I drafted a concept paper and circulated it among a small number of organizations. The JAMS Foundation found the concept in alignment with its missions and offered immediate support. The ABA Section likewise supported the project on the basis of a unanimous recommendation of the Council on the Section of Dispute Resolution taken last fall. We see the strong support of both of these organizations as lending credibility to the project and to the message it seeks to convey.

Editor: Can you tell us about the current status of the project?

Johnson: At the moment we are building our Board of Advisors. The Board of Advisors represents a group of experienced individuals from throughout the country who are heavy users of ADR. We do not propose to launch the program until we have a sufficient number of board members. They will represent the organizations which will be the source of both case work and funding. They will also provide project direction, and they are expected to evaluate and provide guidance to the program fellows.

Editor: Please tell us about the program fellows.

La Rue: Let me emphasize that the persons we seek as program fellows are not novices. They will have extensive ADR experience. During the 12- to 18-month program period, the fellows will be assigned cases anywhere from 24 to 30 in number – that originate from our Advisory Board members. The fellows will serve as mediators of those cases and they will be paid an hourly rate. Following the mediation, the parties will submit an evaluation, which will be shared with the Board of Advisors. Board members will serve as mentors, and they will critique and provide guidance to the program fellows on an ongoing basis. At the conclusion of the fellowship period at least some of the program fellows may be asked to serve as mentors for the incoming class of program fellows. From all of the fellows we ask for a commitment to work to increase diversity in the ADR field.

Editor: Who are the members of the Board of Advisors and what kinds of organizations will they represent?

Johnson: We are looking for people from the corporate sector, from law firms and from the insurance industry, both plaintiff and defense groups. We want to have a variety of the cases for the fellows to work on, and we want to look at the program, and its progress, from a variety of perspectives. We expect to have a few people on the board from organizations that cannot make a financial contribution to the program but who possess insights of particular importance in evaluating it.

Editor: Please tell us what you hope to accomplish with ACCESS ADR. Is it a pilot program meant to lead to other initiatives, or do you anticipate that it is going to be a permanent undertaking of the JAMS Foundation and the ABA?

La Rue: While JAMS and the ABA are strong supporters of this effort, it is not a JAMS or an ABA project. It is a stand-alone project that is the outgrowth of what the Board of Advisors is so important. The board members constitute the engine that will make the train run. Of course, whenever you start something new you are bound to run into things that you do not anticipate. For that reason, we wanted this initiative to start its life relatively small in size, with clearly achievable goals and to proceed with a certain deliberation. We really want to get this right. If we do, this project may evolve into something much bigger and, indeed, become a permanent presence in the ADR field. If it accomplishes our goal – increasing diversity in ADR – it will have been well worth the effort.

Editor: How are things proceeding?

La Rue: We have both been very pleased with the response we have received from the organizations to whom we have spoken about the project. This appears to be generating a considerable amount of excitement, and that is very gratifying. People are interested, and that is spurring us on to launch the program in a very concrete way over the next several months.

Editor: If some of our readers would like to inquire about becoming a fellow or joining the Board of Advisors, how would they go about it?

Johnson: The program is going to be administered through the Center for Alternative Dispute Resolution and persons interested in becoming a fellow may approach the Center by accessing one of the three ADR coordinators: Jay Welsh, Vice President and General Counsel of JAMS at jwelsh@jamsadr.com or (949) 224-1810; Marvin Johnson, Co-Founder, ACCESS ADR at marvinjohnson@jam- sadr.com or (202) 942-9180; or Homer La Rue, Co-Founder, ACCESS ADR at hlaru@jamsadr.com or (202) 942-9180.