

ATLA Convention Boston, USA

By Eva Scheerlinck



Eva Scheerlinck and Elizabeth Coleman, Executive Director, NY State Trial Lawyers Association.



Australian delegates, Jo Hintz and Damian Scattini.



David C Johnson.

civil justice effort to represent the victims and families of September 11. All in all, the free legal work by the volunteers of Trial Lawyers Care, which included Australian plaintiff lawyers, was a donation equivalent to 100 years of professional time. The Victims Compensation Fund's Special Master conducted 905 hearings, agreeing to hear from anyone wanting to see him. He told of the

courage and the determination of the families, and spoke of the mental toll of reliving the terrors of September 11 every day while he oversaw the Fund.

A special full-day session on Tort Reform: An international problem with international solutions, was moderated by APLA Queensland Branch President, Gerry Mullins. The day was a major success. The morning session outlining the status of tort law changes in Australia, the UK, Europe, Canada and Mexico gave an eye-opening, yet unsurprising, overview of an international effort to strip consumers of their fundamental rights. Keynote speaker on the day, David C Johnson, author of *The Attack on Trial Lawyers and Tort Law*, a Commonwealth Institute report, provided some studied insights into the international tort reform movement. This report is recommended to all members and can be found at www.commonwealthinstitute.org/ATLAremarks.htm.

On the second-last day of the convention, the focus changed to politics as Senator John Edwards was named John Kerry's presidential running mate. Edwards, a former plaintiff lawyer, was widely celebrated by the ATLA delegates that day, delivering improved hope for a new democratic presidency in the USA. John Edwards dominated conversation as well as the minds and hearts of all 3,262 convention delegates.

Other highlights included the spectacular Fourth of July fireworks over the Charles River, accompanied by the sounds of the Boston Pops; the Young Lawyers Party that saw many delegates party into the early hours of the morning; and the many educational sessions over the five days. The most popular education sessions included How experts can make or break your case and State-of-the-art motor vehicle collision trial techniques.

While only a handful of Australians attended this year's convention, they all felt the experience was extremely worthwhile. Next year's convention will be in Toronto from 23 to 27 July. I commend it to all members of the Australian Lawyers Alliance and confirm that the program is indeed relevant and of interest to Australian lawyers. ■

Eva Scheerlinck is the Australian Lawyers Alliance's Chief Executive Officer.

I recently attended the annual convention of the Association of Trial Lawyers of America. This year's convention was hosted in Boston from 3 to 7 July – a magnificent backdrop for a convention held over the Fourth of July weekend.

This was my first ATLA conference, and though I had been thoroughly briefed by seasoned ATLA convention-goers beforehand, nothing could have prepared me for the size and complexity of this week-long event.

The mix of educational sessions, special interest groups, social activity and networking opportunities was staggering. The days start as early as 6:30am for the Litigation at Sunrise series. These sessions, despite the early start, are well attended, and come with their own set of papers for those able to get out of bed. Topics this year included: How to discredit the 'independent' medical examiner for bias; The soul of foot malpractice claims; and Crash-course in crashworthiness.

There were many highlights. The honouring of outgoing ATLA CEO, Tom Henderson (see 'ATLA farewells a civil justice champion' in Plaintiff, July 2004), at a special ATLA endowment dinner was something to behold. Tributes were paid to Tom in a special video presentation by all the ATLA presidents who had served with him over the past 16 years, and a history of his achievements throughout his tenure was presented to all in attendance.

Another special memory of the convention was the speech by Robert F Kennedy Jr who spoke at the ATLA membership and awards luncheon. Speaking for 45 minutes, almost without drawing breath, Robert gave an impassioned and inspiring address to an enthralled, full-capacity audience. He spoke about the actions of governments in destroying the environment and forsaking long-term quality-of-life issues for short-term corporate allegiances. Parallels between the movement to destroy the common law and the environmental debate were unquestionable.

A further highlight was the opening plenary session featuring US Supreme Court Justice, Stephen Breyer, and Special Master, Kenneth Feinberg. The session was dedicated to thanking the courageous families and tireless volunteer lawyers who participated in Trial Lawyers Care, a pro bono