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🌿 Rooted in Peace. Growing Through Connection. 🌿

September 2026

A Word from NYSDRA's Executive Director



Dear Friends,

As we move into September, excitement is building for what promises to be one of NYSDRA's most engaging Annual Conferences yet. On **October 8 and 9**, our dispute resolution community will come together under this year's theme, **Rooted in Peace: One Tree, Many Branches**, to learn from nationally recognized leaders, exchange ideas, celebrate our profession, and strengthen the relationships that make our work possible.

This issue of the newsletter offers a preview of what's ahead. You'll meet our outstanding keynote speakers, **Susan Guthrie, Esq.**, founder of Guthrie Consulting & Media, and **Bill Doherty, Ph.D.**, Co-founder of Braver Angels, whose presentations will challenge us to think deeply about the human side of conflict resolution in a rapidly changing world. You'll also find highlights from our conference program, featuring more than 20 sessions on topics ranging from artificial intelligence and ethics to restorative practices, practitioner well-being, and the future of ADR. And there is much to look forward to as we prepare for a milestone celebration of the **Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award**. Marking the award's 30th anniversary, we will honor the **Maryland Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO)** as our 2026 recipient during a very special Day Two Awards Luncheon—with some wonderful connections to the award's history making this year's presentation especially meaningful.

We're also pleased to feature one of NYSDRA's cornerstone programs, **the Lemon Law Arbitration Program**, along with news and accomplishments from our statewide Community Dispute Resolution Center network. These stories remind us that, every day, our members are making a meaningful difference in communities across New York.

This year's conference also marks the public launch of the **Lawrence H. Cooke Dispute Resolution Legacy Fund** and the unveiling of the **Founding Tree**. We hope you'll take a moment to learn about this important initiative and consider becoming a Founding Donor or Sponsor as we work together to preserve Chief Judge Cooke's vision for future generations.

If you haven't already registered, I invite you to do so now. And if you know individuals who would benefit from joining New York's premier gathering of dispute resolution professionals, I encourage you to invite them. Be sure to explore the registration information, sponsorship and vendor opportunities, upcoming trainings, and support events featured throughout this issue.

I look forward to seeing many of you virtually on October 8 and in person at The Desmond on October 9 as we celebrate our shared commitment to building stronger communities through dialogue,

Spotlight on Susan Guthrie, Esq. - Day One Keynote Speaker

Founder, Guthrie Consulting & Media



Susan Guthrie is a nationally recognized attorney, mediator, speaker, trainer, and legal technology consultant with more than three decades of experience in dispute resolution and professional practice development. The Immediate Past Chair of the American Bar Association Section of Dispute Resolution, she has trained 25,000+ professionals in mediation, legal technology, online dispute resolution, and practice innovation.

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Susan is the host of the award-winning podcasts Divorce & Beyond® and The Practice Playbook Podcast, and the author of multiple bestselling books for legal and dispute resolution professionals. Her forthcoming book with ABA Publishing, Future-Proof Your Practice, explores how artificial intelligence, generational change, and the evolving expectations of clients and parties are reshaping legal and dispute resolution practice.

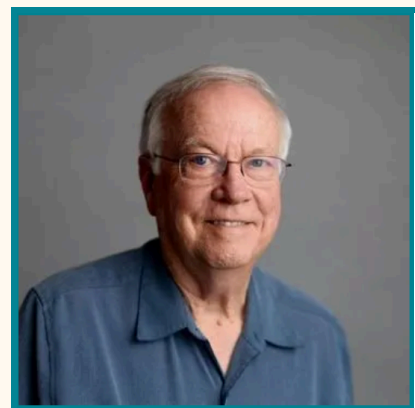
Known for her practical, human-centered approach to innovation, Susan helps professionals integrate technology while preserving the judgment, trust, ethics, and human connection that remain at the heart of effective dispute resolution.

Spotlight on Bill Doherty, Ph.D. - Day Two Keynote Speaker

Co-founder, Braver Angels

Bill Doherty is a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota. As a therapist, he currently focuses on couples on the brink of divorce for whom he developed a clinical approach called Discernment Counseling, and on political stress in relationships.

Bill served as president of the National Council on Family Relations and has authored 15 books for



professionals and the public. Following the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, Bill co-founded Braver Angels, a citizen initiative bringing conservatives and liberals together to counteract political polarization and restore the fraying social fabric in American society.

Bill is the chief designer of the Braver Angels workshops and has conducted sessions all over the country, including for corporations, state legislatures, and the Problem Solvers Caucus in Congress. Braver Angels now has volunteers working in all 50 states. Among his awards is the Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Family Therapy Academy.

30 Years of NYSDRA's Administration of the New York State Lemon Law Arbitration Program



New York enacted its New Car Lemon Law in 1983 and later expanded its protections to used vehicles, wheelchairs, self-propelled farm equipment, and leased vehicle excess wear-and-tear disputes. Central to New York's approach is independent arbitration, providing consumers with a fair, accessible, and cost-effective way to resolve disputes.

Left: Lemon Law Coordinator Kris Manzur and Retired Assistant Attorney General Melvin Goldberg, Esq. at NYSDRA's 2025 Annual Conference

Since 1996, NYSDRA has administered the Lemon Law Arbitration Program on behalf of the New York State Office of the Attorney General. For 30 years, NYSDRA has worked in partnership with Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs) and volunteer arbitrators across all 62 counties, helping ensure that New Yorkers can put the protections of the Lemon Law into practice.

Retired Assistant Attorney General Mel Goldberg's reflections on this milestone:

"Congrats and thanks to NYSDRA for its 30 years of service to New Yorkers and for the decades as the Administrator of the New York Attorney General's Lemon Law programs!"

CDRC Network News

 **Congratulations are in order: Jose Cruzado** 

The Center for Dispute Settlement in Rochester announced a leadership transition: As Dr. Shira May moves on to pursue new opportunities, Jose Cruzado will become the organization's next President and CEO. Thanks to CaTyra Polland for sharing the news.



A message from Jose Cruzado:

"It is with gratitude and a profound sense of honor that I accept the role of President & CEO of the Center for Dispute Settlement. Having served as CDS's Director of Operations, I have seen firsthand the dedication of our staff, volunteers, mediators, and community partners—and the meaningful difference our services make throughout Greater Rochester."

As President & CEO, I am committed to leading with transparency, innovation, and integrity. I look forward to strengthening our mediation services, expanding community programming, investing in our staff, and building partnerships that promote peaceful and constructive conflict resolution."

Jose Cruzado, New CEO/President of Center for Dispute Settlement



🤝 New Mediators! 🤝

Chris Conklin of Child and Family Services Community Mediation Center in Buffalo for shared this update highlighting the enthusiasm and commitment of CMC's newest mediators...

"On July 2, sixteen participants completed the Community Mediation Center's Initial Mediation Training, with fourteen choosing to continue through CMC's apprenticeship program. The new apprentices have already demonstrated tremendous enthusiasm—attending CMC's volunteer picnic, organizing their own meet-ups, and supporting one another through group chats."

CMC is grateful for their dedication and looks forward to watching them grow as practitioners and serve communities throughout Western New York."



🌟 Faith Supple Honored 🌟

Our thanks to **Miriam Frankl of Dispute Resolution Center in Middletown** for sharing this wonderful recognition of Faith Supple's work supporting peer mediation among young people.

On June 4, **Dispute Resolution Center Mediator and Youth Educator Faith Supple** received the Outstanding Youth Worker Award from the Orange County Youth Bureau in recognition of her work with young people.

Through DRC, Faith trains students to become peer mediators and helps schools establish programs that empower students to resolve conflicts through communication, listening, and collaboration.

Right: Miriam Frankl, Faith Supple, and Faith's friend Karen



Faith also brings conflict resolution and communication skills to young people in community settings beyond the schools. Faith received additional recognition from Orange County Executive Steve Neuhaus, Senator Robert Rolison, Assemblyman Jonathan Jacobson, and Congressman Pat Ryan. DRC is immensely proud of Faith and its volunteer mediators for their commitment to building more peaceful communities.

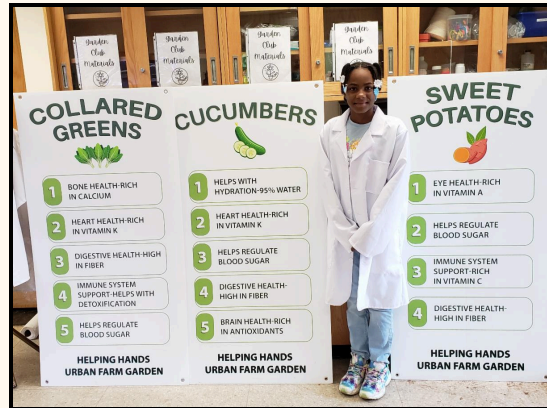


Helping Hands: Growing More Than Vegetables

John McCullough of New Justice Services in Syracuse reported on a project combining science and nutrition education with hands-on vegetable growing for local students.

New Justice Services is the financial agent for a grass roots Hydroponic/Agricultural project operating out of the Syracuse City School District. The project is "Helping Hands" and combines scientific and nutritional education to students with producing vegetable crops in hydroponic towers and open field planting beds. The project is in its 13th year!

Right: Ka'dience Smarr- President of the King School Helping Hands Agricultural Club



Strengthening Court Partnerships, Expanding Access

Angela Smith of Catholic Charities of Delaware, Otsego, and Schoharie Counties reported on renewed partnerships with Civil and Family Courts across five counties, strengthening referral pathways and expanding access to mediation services.



The DRC staff at Catholic Charities of Delaware, Otsego, and Schoharie Counties is strengthening partnerships with Civil and Family Courts across its five-county service area. Renewed collaboration in Chenango and Otsego Counties and the return of in-person court intakes and mediations in Fulton, Montgomery, and Schoharie Counties have already increased referrals and expanded access to services.

Left: The DRC Staff



CDRC Network News showcases local initiatives, partnerships, staff milestones, and other noteworthy developments from our Community Dispute Resolution Center (CDRC) members. Please send your information to [Submit Your News](#)

Dispute Resolution Legacy Fund

Founding Donor Window Ends October 31

Last year, during NYSDRA's 40th Anniversary Conference, Theresa Hobbs announced the creation of the **Lawrence H. Cooke Dispute Resolution Legacy Fund** — an initiative to help ensure that the work Judge Cooke began nearly five decades ago continues to thrive for generations to come. Named in honor of the Chief Judge whose vision created New York's Community Dispute Resolution Center Program, the Legacy Fund,



which will be managed by Merrill Lynch, is a **\$1.5 million endowment campaign** designed to provide lasting support for community dispute resolution across our state.

This fall, the Lawrence H. Cooke Dispute Resolution Legacy Fund has taken an important step forward with the Founding Tree, a lasting tribute to the individuals and organizations who believe in the future of community dispute resolution in New York.

Leading this historic campaign is the **Honorable Lawrence K. Marks**, former Chief Administrative Judge of the New York State Unified Court System, who is serving as Campaign Chair. A longtime champion of access to justice and alternative dispute resolution—and a recipient of the Lawrence H. Cooke Peace Innovator Award—Judge Marks brings decades of leadership and commitment to advancing Chief Judge Cooke's vision for generations to come.

Between now and October 31, members of the ADR community and its supporters are invited to join him as **Founding Donors**. Every Founding Gift will be recognized during the 2026 NYSDRA Annual Conference, October 8–9. Each leaf will represent someone who chose to invest in the Fund at its very beginning—and help lay the foundation for what it can become. **And who better to plant those first roots than the people who know the value of dispute resolution firsthand?**

Chief Judge Lawrence H. Cooke's vision lives on every day across our field: in mediations and restorative conversations, in schools and courtrooms, in the training of new practitioners, and in the countless moments when people are given an opportunity to resolve conflict through dialogue rather than division.

The Founding Tree offers everyone in our community a way to carry that vision forward. Whether you are a mediator, CDRC staff member or volunteer, attorney, judge, educator, ADR professional, community partner, organization, or longtime friend of the field, there is a place for you on the tree.

Early support also sends an important message. When those who understand this work best step forward first, we demonstrate to future supporters and partners that we believe in the future we are asking them to help build.

As Judge Marks reflects:

“Chief Judge Cooke's vision gave New Yorkers something lasting—the belief that communities could resolve their own conflicts with dignity and support. This endowment ensures that promise endures for generations to come.”

The Founding Tree will grow one leaf—and one commitment—at a time. We hope yours will be among them. [Learn more about the Fund and donor opportunities here.](#)

Exciting Conference Updates!



Two Days. 20+ Sessions. Countless Ways to Grow 🌱

Excitement is building for the **2026 NYSDRA Annual Conference, *Rooted in Peace: One Tree, Many Branches*, October 8–9.** 🎉

October 8 will be fully virtual, followed by a hybrid program on October 9 at the Crowne Plaza Albany–The Desmond Hotel in Albany

With more than 20 sessions, two nationally recognized keynote speakers, opportunities to connect with colleagues, and milestone celebrations, this year’s program reflects the breadth and vitality of the dispute resolution community.

Please see the [conference website](#) for a full program for both days. 📄



2026 Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award Recipient

Maryland Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO) ✨

On October 9th, Day Two, during the Award Luncheon at the Desmond Hotel, NYSDRA will proudly honor the **Maryland Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO)** as the 2026 recipient of the **Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award**, recognizing its exceptional contributions to peacebuilding and dispute resolution.

As the Maryland Judiciary’s Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office, MACRO advances the availability, use, and quality of alternative dispute resolution throughout Maryland. Its work strengthens ADR in courts and communities, supports the growth and development of practitioners, and helps the public access dispute resolution services.

MACRO’s statewide impact includes grant support for ADR programs, continuing education, standards of conduct for mediators, research and evaluation, and collaboration with practitioner organizations, community mediation programs, and restorative justice partners.

Right: (Back row) Cheryl Jackson, Nick White, Lisa Mannisi, Monica Villarreal, Cynthia Jurrius, Alecia Parker, Tara Cuffia (Front row) Judy Muller, Tisha McDuffie, Jenn Williams



Together, these efforts reflect the collaborative, innovative, and community-centered spirit at the heart of the Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award.

This recognition is particularly meaningful as NYSDRA celebrates the 30th anniversary of the Andrew Thomas PeaceBuilder Award. **Andrew Thomas** himself contributed to the formative work that helped lay the foundation for MACRO’s creation, bringing this year’s honor full circle. Andrew will join us in Albany to personally present the award to MACRO.



And there is another special connection to MACRO's history: **Lou Gieszl** will travel to Albany to accept the award. Lou served as MACRO's original Deputy Director alongside Rachel Wohl, helping build the organization from the ground up, and later served as President of the Association for Conflict Resolution. Today, he is Assistant State Court Administrator for Programs in the Maryland Judiciary, overseeing five divisions, including MACRO.

Left: Lou Gieszl, Assistant State Court Administrator for Programs at Maryland Judiciary

Bringing Andrew Thomas and Lou Gieszl together for this 30th-anniversary presentation promises to make the luncheon an especially memorable moment—one that connects the people who helped shape MACRO's beginnings with the organization's continuing influence on the field today.

NYSDRA is honored to celebrate MACRO's leadership, its service to the field, and its enduring commitment to building more peaceful approaches to conflict.

Lawrence H. Cooke Dispute Resolution Legacy Fund Founding Tree

The conference will also mark the public launch of the **Lawrence H. Cooke Dispute Resolution Legacy Fund** and the debut of its **Founding Tree**. 🌱 Each leaf will recognize a Founding Donor whose early support is helping establish the foundation for a permanent endowment that will strengthen this vital work for generations to come.

Conference attendees will have a special opportunity to become part of this legacy themselves, adding their names to a growing community of supporters committed to carrying Chief Judge Cooke's vision forward. We hope many who join us in October will [choose to add their own leaf to the Legacy Fund and help it grow](#). 🌱

**We Are Extremely Grateful to Our
Conference Sponsors!** 🤝 📣







and many thanks to our Honorary Committee! ✨

Hon. Lawrence Marks
Hon. Jaclyn A. Brilling
Shira May, Ph.D.
Hyacinth Charles
John Harrison
Wilma Jozwiak
John McCullough
Jonathan Murray
Kim Reisch, Esq.
Alison Ritchie

Upcoming NYSDRA Trainings and Support Events: September 2026 – December 2026



Special Education Dispute Resolution Center (SEDRC)

- If you would like more information about special education mediation, visit [oseDisputeResolution.org](https://www.osedisputeresolution.org), contact info@osedisputeresolution.org or 1-855-RESOLVE for more information



Lemon Law Arbitration Program

- Annual Arbitration Training: October 27-28, 2026
Contact don@nysdra.org or (518) 687-2240 ext. 104



Community Mediation Service Corps (CMSC)

- Two-day Volunteer Orientation: September 8-9, 2026.
Contact toni@nysdra.org or 518-687-2240 ext. 105



Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR)

- ACCES-VR Mediation Training: September 29-30, 2026

Contact toni@nysdra.org or 518-687-2240 ext. 105



Early Intervention

- CDRC Early Intervention Coordinators Quarterly gathering: November 3, 2026

Contact lynne@nysdra.org or 518-687-2240 ext. 106



Founded in 1985, the New York State Dispute Resolution Association promotes and strengthens the use of dispute resolution throughout New York State. Through training, advocacy, and collaboration with courts, government agencies, and community organizations, NYSDRA supports a statewide network of 18 Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs) that provide mediation and restorative practices to thousands of individuals, families, and communities annually. For more information, visit www.nysdra.org.



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