

# First Latino appointed Superior Court judge

*Courts*  
*4.6.2000*  
John Salazar tapped to fill bench vacancy

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SANTA CRUZ — A morning telephone call from Gov. Gray Davis Wednesday was good news for Santa Cruz County Court Commissioner John S. Salazar.

Davis tapped Salazar to fill a vacant Superior Court judgeship, beating four candidates and completing a county bench that has been in flux for several years.

"He's a good judge, he makes good decisions, he's well respected, and well-liked by the staff and people served by the court," Presiding Superior Court Judge Sam Stevens said of the appointment.

Salazar, 42, is the first Latino appointed judge in county history.

"He can be a positive role model for the youth of our county, not only in the courtroom, but as a useful, responsible citizen," defense attorney

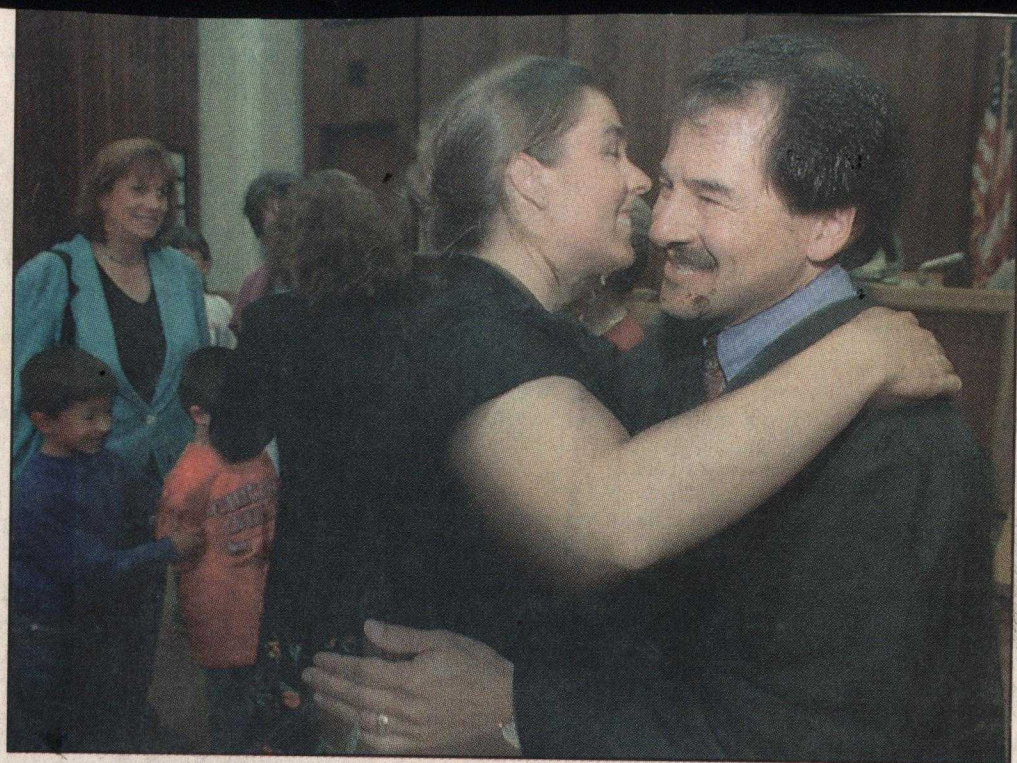
Victor Campos said. "This is tremendous news. He will make an outstanding contribution to the bench."

Officials here wasted no time acting on the announcement, which had been anticipated by the local legal community for months. Salazar was sworn in by Stevens at a private ceremony in Stevens' courtroom Wednesday afternoon.

Along with Salazar's new title comes the power to execute search and arrest warrants. Salazar will also receive a 15 percent pay raise, bringing his annual salary to \$117,912, said Christine Patton, the court's executive officer.

"He was very nice, very cordial and very congratulatory," Salazar said of his conversation with Davis. "I'm honored the governor has the faith to appoint me as judge, and I intend to work hard and live up to those expectations."

Practically speaking, the appointment does not change the day-to-day operations of the court. Salazar will continue to preside over juvenile delinquency cases. He fills the seat vacated in December 1998 by Judge Richard McAdams.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Newly appointed Superior Court Judge John Salazar enjoys a congratulatory hug from a member of the courthouse staff following his swearing-in ceremony Wednesday.

“I told him, ‘Just be patient and your day will arrive.’ It has today and I am so proud of him.”

— Retiring Judge William Kelsay, on John Salazar's appointment to Superior Court judgeship

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## Salazar

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McAdams ran unopposed in 1998 to assume the post of retiring Judge William Kelsay, who has continued to serve the court since his retirement. Most recently he has been hearing misdemeanor cases.

Amid rumblings six months ago of Salazar's possible appointment, Kelsay had agreed to take the court commissioner's slot until the end of the year if the appointment came down.

"Everybody has been kidding me, waiting to call me 'Com-mish,'" Kelsay said. "Maybe in a few days they can."

"I am delighted for John," Kelsay added. "I told him, 'Just be patient and your day will arrive.' It has today and I am so proud of him."

Salazar's road to the judgeship began when he traveled to Sacramento in October for an initial interview with a state judicial nomination commission. Passing that, the commission sent local judges and lawyers a survey with 150 questions probing their experience and qualifications.

Salazar's name was then passed on to Davis for consideration.

Since his appointment as a court commissioner in 1992, Salazar has presided over criminal, civil, family law, depen-

dency, and probate matters. He was assigned to hear juvenile delinquency cases in January.

From 1990 to 1992, Salazar was in private practice in Watsonville, handling personal injury, criminal defense, contract law and wills. Prior to that, he worked for Grunsky, Ebey, Farrar and Howell from 1989 to 1990 on insurance and criminal defense, construction and real estate cases.

Salazar was employed by the county for several years, serving as assistant district attorney from 1987 to 1989, and as a deputy probation officer from 1981 to 1987. He was a group counselor for Santa Clara County Juvenile Hall from 1979 to 1980.

Salazar graduated from San Jose State University in 1980 with a bachelor's degree in administration of justice, and earned a law degree from Monterey College of Law in 1986.

He is a member of the board of directors for Salud Para La Gente and Youth Resource Bank.

Salazar and wife Karen live in Aptos with their 10-year-old daughter and twin 7-year-old sons.

A public swearing-in ceremony is planned for 4:30 p.m. Wednesday in Department 5 at the county courthouse, 701 Ocean St., Santa Cruz.