

WOMAN appointed to court bench

By MARIA GAURA
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SANTA CRUZ — Assistant District Attorney Heather Morse has been named a Municipal Court judge by Gov. George Deukmejian.

The 34-year-old Morse may be the first woman named to the bench in Santa Cruz, she said.

"I believe I am (the first woman judge)," she said. "But I can't confirm that positively."

Morse will fill a fifth Municipal Court

position newly created by the state's trial court funding legislation. Santa Cruz's Municipal Court is currently operating with four judges and a court commissioner. Municipal Court judgeships pay \$82,054 per year.

"Talk about an exciting life!" Morse said. "It's all happening this week."

Morse said she was notified of her promotion Monday afternoon, but wasn't told why she had been chosen over the other candidates. "They didn't tell me why, and I didn't ask," she said.

But, Morse suspects her appointment have hinged on her long involvement with the criminal justice system in Santa Cruz County. A graduate of the University of Washington, Morse came to Santa Cruz in 1976 where she took a job as a deputy court clerk. She then worked as a probation officer before returning to law school and earning her law degree from the University of San Francisco in 1981.

After one year in private practice, Morse took a job with the Monterey District Attorney's office, then applied for a job at the

Santa Cruz County District Attorney's office "as soon as there was an opening," she said.

In her five years as a Santa Cruz prosecutor, Morse has worked her way up to the elite special-prosecution unit, handling some of the county's toughest cases in the past year.

"One of the things that may have helped me is that I started at the bottom and worked my way up," she said.

"I know what it's like to stand at the traffic counter and deal with people who are angry about being cited," Morse said.



Heather Morse

Began as a deputy court clerk