

New judge receives warm welcome

Locals: Appointment helps diversify court

By J.D. HILLARD

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

SANTA CRUZ — Local attorneys on Wednesday greeted the appointment of Monterey County prosecutor Denine Guy to a vacant Santa Cruz County judge's seat with general approval, praising her character, experience and the diversity she brings to the court.

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Larry Biggam, Santa Cruz County's chief public defender, praised Guy's consistent volunteer work—gathering and wrapping Christmas presents for needy families.

"I think that speaks volumes," Biggam said. "She has an excellent character and I hope she'll make a great judge."

There was no reason to think Guy's years of work as a prosecutor would not hamper her fairness to defendants, Biggam said.

"Some excellent judges come from the district attorney's office," he said.

Guy, 42, of Aptos was "extremely honored," she said, to assume the seat on the Santa Cruz County Superior Court bench left vacant when presiding Judge Kathleen Akao died in November. She looks forward not only to the daily work she can do in providing a fair courtroom, but also to the role judges play in the community. Akao, she noted, contributed extensive support to CASA, an organization that provides adult advocates for children in court. Arthur Danner III, who served on the court until his



Judge Denine Guy

death in January, contributed to the establishment of a residential addiction treatment program in the county jail.

Guy grew up in Boulder Creek, and became interested in the law as a student at San Lorenzo Valley High School.

"I wanted to be an advocate for the people," Guy said.

That intention led her through college and the Monterey School of Law and into civil practice as a person injury attorney at the former firm of Judge Robert Yonts. From civil law, she entered public service as a prosecutor for the Monterey County District Attorney's Office, where she prosecut-

ed several varieties of criminal cases and brought civil actions in consumer and environmental protection cases.

The law continues to excite her, she said, because she thrives on the personal interactions it brings, even those with people who are hostile, though she prefers to avoid hostile interactions if possible.

Santa Cruz County District Attorney Bob Lee lauded both Guy's broad litigation experience, which includes work in personal injury civil lawsuits and criminal prosecution of domestic violence and felony cases as well as her civil enforcement work. Her background meant she could "hit the ground running" even with complex cases, Lee said. In addition, as an experienced courtroom prosecutor, Guy brings empathy for victims that Lee said was very important.

"Her experience with consumer protection gives her a familiarity with the financial crimes regularly perpetrated against consumers," said Bill Atkinson, who prosecutes consumer protection cases for the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office.

"She is keenly aware of the many types of scams and fraud that are perpetrated daily upon consumers throughout the county and the state."

The court benefits further, Lee said, because Guy is a woman. The perspective of women on the bench is important but has been missing. Currently the only woman on the court is presiding Judge Heather Morse. One other woman, Jana Cast-Davis, serves as one of three commissioners.

"I'm hoping the other judges are women too. I think it makes a more balanced bench," Lee said.

Denine added that she brings a variety of diverse perspectives to her judgeship. She will be the youngest judge on the bench, she said. Also, half of her family is Hispanic. The wide variety of cases she worked means she will also bring a legal sort of diversity to the court.

Guy faces weeks of training after she assumes her new position. New judges attend orientation within the court and at schools out of the county, said Court Administrative Officer Alex Calvo. In addition, new judges attend judges' college, where they learn judicial ethics, how to manage cases, how the judicial branch of the state government operates and the basics of taking pleas and handing down sentences.

Guy is expected to begin work July 3. A public investiture was scheduled for July 7.