

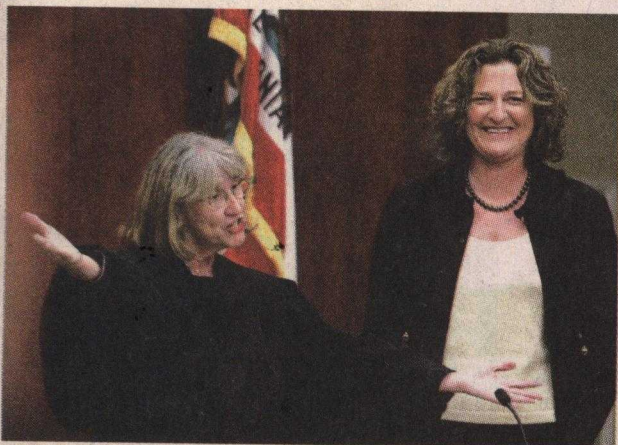
JUDGE REBECCA CONNOLLY

Celebrating a new arrival to the bench

Courts

Friends, colleagues, supporters pack Watsonville courtroom

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BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

US District Court judge Patricia Trumbull, left, presents newly sworn-in Superior Court judge Rebecca Connolly at Connolly's investiture Friday in Watsonville.

By JENNIFER SQUIRES
jsquires@santacruzsentinel.com

WATSONVILLE — Judge Rebecca Connolly marked her arrival to the Santa Cruz Superior Court bench with a hug from one of her mentors Friday.

Patricia Trumbull, a U.S. District Court judge who Connolly clerked for as a young lawyer, had the honor of swearing in Connolly, then helping her into a black robe at Connolly's investiture.

Friday afternoon's ceremony at the Watsonville courthouse was a celebration for the new judge, though Connolly, 46, took the judicial oath and started work on the bench Sept. 1.

Connolly's colleagues, friends and supporters filled the Department C courtroom and spilled into Department B, where the

ceremony was shown via video link.

Trumbull said it was great to watch Connolly advance in her career.

"It's sort of like I'm her mom," Trumbull said. "She's a wonderful lawyer and I know she's going to be a great judge."

Connolly thanked her partner, Peter Zedak, for standing by her through the lengthy campaign, and called her teenage daughter, Chloe, her cheerleader.

"This has been an amazing journey," she said.

Connolly, an Aptos resident, launched her campaign for judge in February 2009 and defeated Santa Cruz defense attorney Steve Wright in June's election. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed her to the bench early; her elected term begins

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JUDGE

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Jan. 1.

She replaced Judge Michael Barton, who retired this summer.

Tulare County Superior Court Judge Valeriano Saucedo, who worked with Connolly at the California Rural Assistance League 20 years ago, called her humble, honest and patient, values she honed while working with impoverished field workers.

"I supported Rebecca because I knew she would treat everyone with dignity and respect," he said.

Connolly is one of four women on the 10-judge local bench and is assigned to one of the county's two misdemeanor courts. She is fluent in Spanish, a skill only one other Santa Cruz judge has.

Frederick Ebey, one of the partners at

'I supported Rebecca because I knew she would treat everyone with dignity and respect.'

JUDGE VALERIANO SAUCEDO,
Tulare County Superior Court

Grunsky, Ebey, Farrar and Howell, the Watsonville law firm where Connolly had worked for the past seven years, said she is an experienced attorney and hard worker who will do her share.

"She's very bright," Ebey said. "You're going to enjoy working with her."

He also warned other local judges that the former Division I college volleyball player will destroy them in any athletic contest.

"When she asks you out for a friendly game of tennis, don't take her on," Ebey said.