

John Gallagher takes the oath of office as a superior court judge with his wife Peg by his side in a ceremony at the Watsonville courthouse on Tuesday.

LARISSA MUELLER/SENTINEL

New judge sworn in

Courts
John Gallagher officially welcomed at Watsonville investiture ceremony

By DONNA JONES

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WATSONVILLE — In a Watsonville courtroom packed with family, friends, supporters and Santa Cruz County's top political and law enforcement leaders, Superior Court Judge John Gallagher was welcomed to the bench during a formal investiture Tuesday.

The swearing-in, marked by a patriotic sing-along and presentations by former law office colleagues, was more celebration than ceremony.

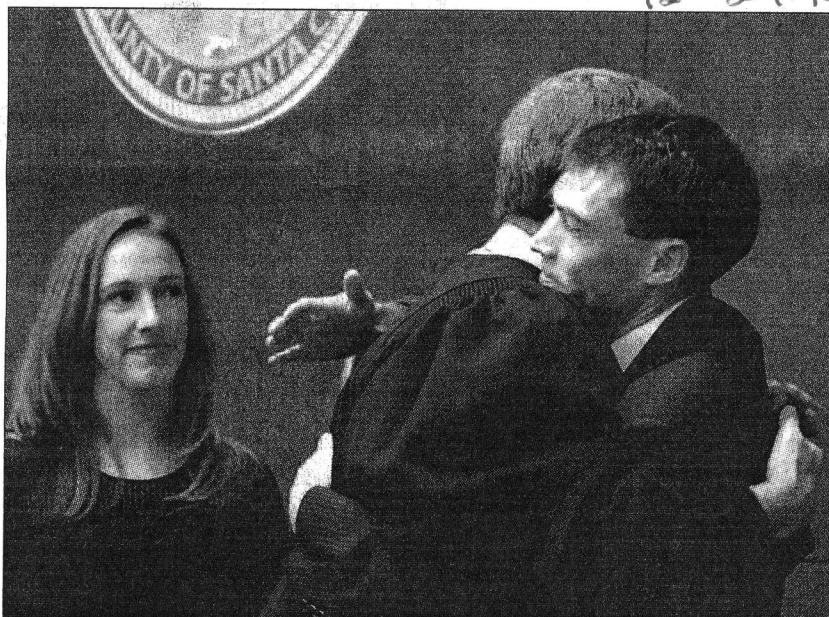
"I absolutely love my new job," said Gallagher, 60. "I strongly felt I was going to like the job, that I was well-qualified and that I could do a really good job. I hope that's the way it's turning out, but another jury will determine that."

Gallagher was elected to the bench in June for a six-year term that was to start Jan. 1. But after Judge Robert Attack retired early, Gallagher was appointed to the seat in August. Since then, he has presided over a misdemeanor court in Santa Cruz.

He took the oath of office privately earlier, but delayed the public ceremony so family members could attend.

He's already known for his politeness to all who come into his court. He said he values the dignity of people, and he makes sure to look into defendants' eyes, even when he has to sentence them to jail time or big fines.

"I've grown to believe respecting people is about the most important thing,"



LARISSA MUELLER/SENTINEL

John Gallagher embraces his son Ben Molin after his investiture as a superior court judge in a ceremony in Watsonville on Tuesday.

Gallagher said.

Gallagher clearly has earned respect in the local legal community, where he's worked for more than 30 years on criminal and civil cases.

Tuesday, Larry Biggam of Biggam, Christensen & Minsloff, which holds the county public defender contract, recalled some of the highlights of Gallagher's early career in his office.

Gallagher was smart and a hard

worker, Biggam said. Assisting in the defense of the Trailside Killer, David Carpenter, in 1981, for example, Gallagher wrote 120 motions, including a winning change of venue request that moved the trial to Los Angeles.

Biggam told Gallagher he had no doubts about his readiness for the bench.

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'I've grown to believe respecting people is about the most important thing.'

JOHN GALLAGHER, Superior Court judge

JUDGE

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"You're thorough. You're decent and you care," he said

Lloyd Williams of Bosso Williams, where Gallagher spent the past two decades working on civil cases ranging from freedom of information to land use, echoed Biggam's remarks. He said Gallagher was quiet and focused, and could be "very intense" when dealing with complicated cases. But over the years, he developed a balanced and calm demeanor, a judicial temperament that "just bodes very well," Williams said.

Though Gallagher lives in Scotts Valley and spent most of his professional life in Santa Cruz, he chose Watsonville for the celebration as a way of thanking the community for its support of his candidacy. He said he wanted to show the community that the court understands how important it is to fully utilize its "state of the art" judicial facility, which saw the loss of some services in recent budget cuts.

"It's my way of saying 'Watsonville, you're really important to me too.'"