

✓ ^{COURTS} ⁵⁻⁶⁻⁸⁶ Plenty of candidates for vacant judgeship

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SANTA CRUZ — In the wake of Municipal Court Judge John Marlo's election Tuesday to Superior Court, there appears to be no dearth of candidates to replace him.

Adding to the opportunity for those hoping to see "judge" before their name is the chance that a fifth Municipal Court may be created in the next year and a half.

The county Board of Supervisors will vote on whether to fund such a court, which has been recommended by the County Administrator's Office in its budget proposal.

Assemblyman Sam Farr, D-Monterey, has submitted a bill in the state legislature as the necessary first step to create such a court,

which has been urged by the state Judicial Council.

Marlo has been a Municipal Court Judge in Watsonville since 1973. He will succeed retiring Superior Court Judge Donald O. May on Jan. 1 — that is, if May holds to his announced schedule of retiring by the end of the year.

There is always the chance that May, who is still recovering from heart surgery, might step down before the end of his term, thus leaving his seat up for appointment by Gov. George Deukmejian.

In such a case, Marlo, who will take over no matter what in January, would be the likely choice for appointment.

Several judges have indicated the Watsonville post might become a rotating seat, a possibility Marlo

said he was strongly opposed to. Marlo has been in Watsonville full-time for 13 years, and said he felt the community deserved and needed a permanent judge.

Whatever happens in Watsonville, and whatever happens with a fifth Municipal court, somebody is going to be appointed to the court in the next six months.

Judge Richard McAdams, who lost to Marlo in Tuesday's election, is still a Municipal Court judge, and is in the middle of a term he won three years ago. One logical candidate to replace Marlo is Commissioner Phil Watts, who also happens to be a friend and political ally of Marlo's.

Watts, who normally presides over traffic court and who also serves as a fill-in judge when the others

are away from the bench, has an application on file with the governor's office for any potential Municipal Court opening.

Several local assistant district attorneys also have expressed interest in the post, including Bob Patterson, Jim Berglund, Don Gartner and Bob Noonan.

The last time a vacancy opened on the court, the post went to a lawyer in the District Attorney's Office — Tom Kelly, then the chief assistant to District Attorney Art Danner.

Before Kelly's appointment, several local lawyers had filed applications for the job, and those may also still be on file with the governor's office.