

3 judges oppose move to Phoenix courtrooms

Reorganization plan will allow for change to family, civil cases

By Jim Walsh

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Three Maricopa County Superior Court judges have decided to stay in Mesa, even though their criminal calendars have been moved to Phoenix as part of a court reorganization plan.

Judges Teresa Sanders, Emmet Ronan and Helene Abrams all "rotated" onto family court or civil calendars to avoid the long, slow commute to Phoenix for themselves and their staffs.

Judge John Ditsworth, another East Valley resident and a former veteran prosecutor, used the reorganization as an opportunity to move his civil calendar closer to home in Mesa.

The game of judicial musical chairs was set off by Presiding Judge Barbara Rodriguez Mundell's controversial decision earlier this year to consolidate all criminal trials in Phoenix, reversing a practice that had been in place since 1991 when the Southeast Regional Facility opened. The moves took effect this week.

"It's not totally their decision. People rotate all the time," said Jessica Funkhouser, Mundell's special counsel. "What Judge Mundell decides is in the best interest in the court."

Mundell has authority over all judicial assignments and could have forced the three East Valley criminal judges to move

to Phoenix, Funkhouser said.

Mundell believes that consolidating the criminal courts in Phoenix will improve court efficiency and save money, but her decision shocked many East Valley officials who didn't anticipate the move until the controversial Criminal Courts Tower opens in 2012.

Critics believe the consolidation will inconvenience East Valley residents, including victims, witnesses, police, defendants and potential jurors, who will have to drive downtown for criminal court matters.

But Presiding Criminal Court Judge Gary Donahoe argues more people will benefit from the additional family court and civil judges available to handle cases in the East Valley.

"Both Abrams and Sanders preferred to stay in Mesa. That's why they rotated to the family court assignments," said Southeast Presiding Judge David Talamante. "I think it's because of the transportation."

Many judges consider family court the least appealing assignment because people going through a divorce are often very emotional and are not represented by attorneys.

Superior Court judges are generally rotated every two or three years to keep them fresh and to broaden their experience in handling a wide range of cases.

Sign firm switches to non-toxic ink

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Using a new non-toxic water-based ink, Caliber Signs in Tempe has become the first Arizona company to produce ozone-free banners and other commercial materials for businesses.

"The new 75 percent water, 25 percent latex ink is an industry first," said Mike LaPorte, vice president of business development at Caliber Signs. "Our industry has been trying for years to remove the solvents that release dangerous chemicals into our air and environment, while preserving the rich, vibrant color that a solvent-based ink is known for. And

Hewlett-Packard is the one that finally cracked the code."

Each green item that Caliber Signs creates helps to reduce the 1.5 billion pounds of PVC banner materials Hewlett-Packard estimates was consumed and ended up in landfills last year, LaPorte said. "That's the equivalent of a banner 1,000 feet wide stretching from Los Angeles to New York."

LaPorte observed that every business that turns to recyclable green ink and materials for its promotional materials would help to contribute to a "massive" reduction in ozone pollution and landfill waste.