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Recent Judicial Profiles

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Eddie C. Sturgeon

Eddie Sturgeon, a civil court judge, has also served as dean of the California Judicial College.



Eddie C. Sturgeon

Superior Court Judge
San Diego County

Career highlights: Elevated by unification to San Diego County Superior Court, 1998; appointed to San Diego County Municipal Court, 1988; sole practitioner, El Cajon, 1980-88; partner, Miller & Sturgeon, San Diego, 1978-80; partner, Tolman, Miller & Sturgeon, San Diego, 1976-78; associate, Tolman & Lorello, San Diego, 1974-76

Law school: University of Santa Clara School of Law, 1973

Age: 66

By Pat Broderick

SAN DIEGO - For Superior Court Judge Eddie Sturgeon, having served as the dean of the California Judicial College is among his proudest achievements.

"I've been able to lead judicial education in the state of California," said Sturgeon, who served as dean in 2009 and 2010. "I enjoy teaching new judges tremendously."

While busy with a heavy load of civil cases at the main courthouse in downtown San Diego, Sturgeon still finds time to teach through the Center for Judiciary Education and Research and the California Judges Association.

"We have about 100 new judges a year," he said. "One day you're an attorney, the next day, 'I get a robe. Now what do I do?'"

Among the biggest obstacles new judges face is that, "Sometimes when you put the robe on, you think you have to know everything," said

Sturgeon, who added he isn't shy about asking for help.

"A lot of times, even today, the attorneys who appear in front of me know more than me, because this is all they practice," he said. "Don't be afraid to let the attorneys educate you on their field. They will be more than happy to help you."

'Don't be afraid to let the attorneys educate you on their field. They will be more than happy to help you.'

- Eddie C. Sturgeon

State Supreme Court Justice Carol A. Corrigan, who has taught at the California Judicial College with Sturgeon for many years, joked, "Being dean of the judges' college is like organizing a sack full of snakes."

Judges and Judiciary

Longtime Eastern District judge to retire
U.S. District Judge Lawrence K. Karlton, who ruled in 1995 that California prison conditions violated the U.S. Constitution, is stepping down.

U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit Kozinski blasts Google, orders company to take down anti-Muslim video

Google Inc.'s refusal to honor an imperiled actress' pleas to take down an incendiary YouTube.com video drew harsh words Wednesday from Chief Judge Alex Kozinski of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Administrative/Regulatory

Weed banking guidance: baby steps

This month, the Obama administration issued new guidance for banks, purportedly clarifying how they can provide financial services to marijuana-related businesses. By **Theodore F. Monroe and Bradley O. Cebeci**

Litigation

Judge tentatively sides with San Diego water authority in suit

A judge has tentatively sided with the San Diego County Water Authority in a battle in which it accuses the Metropolitan Water District of Los Angeles of overcharging it for water deliveries.

Law Practice

Squire Sanders, Patton Boggs in merger talks

Washington, D.C.-based Patton Boggs LLP is in merger discussions with international firm Squires Sanders LLP, the firms confirmed Wednesday.

Education

People using laptops for Bar Exam complain of software glitch

About a dozen people using laptops to write the California Bar Exam have complained a software problem interfered with their ability to type. The State Bar says laptop users assume the risk of technical problems.

Real Estate

Real Estate Deals

A roundup of recent real estate activity and the lawyers involved.

Litigation

Howrey estate files another clawback claim

Reed Smith LLP this week became the latest firm to be dragged into the ongoing Howrey LLP bankruptcy case after the defunct firm's estate filed an unfinished business claim involving two California attorneys.

"There are a thousand moving parts and a whole lot of brand new people coming to the profession and they don't want to look stupid," she said.

Corrigan gives Sturgeon top grades for his efforts.

"When you're dean, you have to juggle all of that, along with the big brains on the faculty, and make everybody happy for two weeks. That is virtually impossible."

A native San Diegan, Sturgeon said he knew from the age of 6 - when he was running about the house in a little suit and briefcase - that he wanted to be a lawyer.

That goal inspired him all the way to University of Santa Clara School of Law. After he graduated in 1973, Sturgeon found work with Tolman & Lorello, a San Diego law firm that had specialized in civil cases.

"They were just starting a criminal department," he added. "I was the new attorney on the block, so I started doing all the criminal defense cases."

While Sturgeon also did some civil cases, he said, "I really fell in love with criminal, because you're in the courtroom so much more. I wanted to be a trial lawyer."

When he struck out on his own in 1980, Sturgeon handled mostly criminal defense cases with a sprinkling of personal injury disputes thrown into the mix.

"I was in the courtroom every day trying cases," he said. "That's where I lived."

While he relished his life as a trial attorney, Sturgeon started thinking about a new challenge when a couple of judges he knew suggested that he consider the bench.

He applied and, in 1988, Sturgeon was appointed to the municipal court by Gov. George Deukmejian.

Noting that the governor tended to favor prosecutors for judicial appointments, Sturgeon considered himself fortunate.

"I think I had a good reputation with the D.A.s as a straight shooter," he said. "Your reputation is so important in this profession."

In 1998, Sturgeon was elevated by unification to the Superior Court.

In 2007, Sturgeon was among 27 judges assigned by Chief Justice Ronald M. George to help ease the heavy backlog of criminal cases at Riverside County.

Once there, Sturgeon said he was shocked to discover how hard a hit the right to a speedy trial had taken.

"I almost fell off the bench," he recalled about one particular session in Riverside. "'You've been in custody for how long and you haven't had a trial?' This is the United States of America, people. We don't do that here."

He added, "I pumped some work out of that place, and we did a good job up there."

Despite his heavy caseload, Sturgeon has continued to stay involved in a program called "Every 15 Minutes," which dramatizes for students throughout the county the tragedy of drunk driving.

"I get a lot of feedback from parents," he added. "It's a dynamite program."

Robert G. Knaier, a partner at Chapin Fitzgerald LLP, has represented both plaintiffs and defendants in a variety of matters before Sturgeon.

"He is consistently well-versed in the facts and the law, and always gives each side of a dispute fair consideration," Knaier said. "I am regularly impressed by the care he gives to each case, his acknowledgement of the concerns of all involved, and his efforts to decide matters in thoughtful, creative ways."

Intellectual Property

Jury decides royalty rate in state's first-of-its-kind patent trial

The patent licensing trial pitting Realtek Semiconductor Corp. against LSI Corp., the first dispute of its kind in California to be decided by a jury, ended Wednesday with neither litigant achieving the result it sought.

Criminal

Defense attorneys criticize Supreme Court ruling on warrantless searches

The nation's highest court's latest decision drew sharp rebuke from California criminal defense attorneys and privacy advocates.

Sentencing commission could bring major reforms

A body dedicated to reducing prison population could forge much-needed reform to California's system, legal academics say.

Bankruptcy

Justices consider bankruptcy tale of 'Lili Lin of China'

The bankruptcy court needs workable mechanisms to enforce the underlying spirit of the bankruptcy code. By **Steven Gubner and Michael Davis**

Appellate Practice

Common pitfalls of appellate practice

If you only occasionally have an appeal and wish not to be caught off-guard, here are a few pitfalls to avoid. By **Robert J. Stumpf, Jr., Karin Vogel and Guylyn Cummins**

Constitutional Law

Prisoner sex change latest flare in 'cruel and unusual' debate

In recent decades, the high court has opined that inhumane prison conditions equal cruel and unusual punishment, and a slew of lawsuits have been filed alleging inhumane conditions. By **Joseph Sorrentino**

Judicial Profile

Eddie C. Sturgeon

Superior Court Judge San Diego County

Corporate Counsel

Victor D. Chen

Director of Legal Affairs for Alienvault LLC San Mateo

Personal Injury & Torts

Medical liens are on the rise among personal injury plaintiffs

The California Supreme Court's three-year old decision in *Howell v. Hamilton Meats* has led many personal injury plaintiffs to seek out liens to cover their medical costs in an effort to recover more money from health insurers.

Randall L. Brownwood, a partner with Austin, Brownwood, Cannon & Santa Cruz, credits Sturgeon for his demeanor.

"He has a sense of humor that makes it easy to be in his court," Brownwood said. "Sometimes he makes a decision that appears to be the most reasonable and fair, rather than strictly according to the law."

George Brewster, chief deputy county counsel, said "[Sturgeon] truly listens to each side and then makes the call - including the tough calls as warranted."

Meanwhile, Sturgeon is contending with the dwindling of resources plaguing judges throughout the state.

He recently transferred to downtown San Diego from his longtime courthouse in El Cajon after the civil department and other services were funneled to the main courthouse.

"We had to do it because we got whacked millions," Sturgeon said. "It's horrible, and it's not fair to the citizens that have to drive all the way to downtown. The Legislature has to start understanding, I would hope."

But for all of that, Sturgeon said that he continues to be energized and loves being a judge.

"I've got some huge cases that are coming up," he added, "and I can't wait to try them."

Here are some of Judge Sturgeon's recent cases and the lawyers involved:

Hidden Valley Ranch v. Ramona Municipal Water District, 2010-65606 - water dispute

For the plaintiff: Manuel Corrales Jr., San Diego

For the defendant: Melissa Woo, San Diego

Lane v. Bell, 2011-67396 - property dispute

For the plaintiff: Ross E. Veta, Veta & Veta, San Diego

For the defendant: Teresa Trucchi, Suppa Trucchi & Henein LLP, San Diego

Hidden v. Brunelle Family Trust, 2011-68186 - land dispute

For the plaintiff: Manuel De La Torre, Los Angeles

For the defendant: J. Robert O'Connor, O'Connor & Packer APC, San Diego

Jellison v. Freymiller, 2010-65496 - wrongful death

For the plaintiff: Robert G. Knaier, Chapin Fitzgerald LLP, San Diego

For the defendant: George W. Brewster Jr., county counsel's office; Scott D. Schabacker, San Diego; Randall L. Brownwood, Austin, Brownwood, Cannon & Santa Cruz, San Diego

Harris v. Cajon Valley Union School District, 2011-66665 - trip/fall

For the plaintiff: Harry Harrison, Harrison & Bodell LLP, San Diego

For the defendant: Jennifer Creighton, Winet Patrick Gayer Creighton & Hanes, Vista

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