

Judge Murphy named to Md. appellate court

By Sheridan Lyons
Staff Writer

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Judge Joseph F. Murphy Jr. of the Baltimore County Circuit Court was appointed to Maryland's Court of Special Appeals yesterday to replace retired Judge Rosalyn Blake Bell.

Judge Murphy, a former Baltimore City prosecutor and defense lawyer, law school professor and author of the Maryland Evidence Handbook, received the formal announcement from Gov. William Donald Schaefer's office late yesterday afternoon at his chambers in Towson, where he was awaiting a jury verdict in a civil case.

The 1994 Maryland Senate must confirm the appointment.

Judge Murphy would then serve until the general election of 1994, the governor's office said.

Then he would run for a full 10-year term.

Yesterday, he said, "I'm very grateful for the appointment," which is effective immediately.

He also said he isn't ready to leave the trial court right away.

His caseload includes a death-penalty case in which an employee at the Cockeysville Sizzler restaurant was killed.

"I hope that I'll be cross-designated as a Circuit judge and a Court of Special Appeals judge at least through Labor Day, so I can complete some cases that were specially set," he said.

He would fill the vacancy on the higher court left by Judge Bell of Montgomery County.

Judge Bell held an at-large seat, rather than a geographically designated one.

Her mandatory retirement at age 70 came April 22, after 10 years on the court.

Judge Murphy, a 49-year-old native of Fitchburg, Mass., graduated from Boston College and the University of Maryland School of Law.

He was an assistant prosecutor in the city state's attorney's office from 1970 until 1976, and served as deputy state's attorney in his last year there.

He is married to the former Jo-Ann Marie Cechin. Their daughter Erin, 22, begins law school in the fall.

Judge Murphy worked in the Towson law firm of White & Murphy with veteran defense attorney Russell J. White from 1976 until his appointment to the Baltimore County Circuit Court in 1984.

He has served as chairman of the Maryland State Bar Association's criminal law section and as president of the Maryland Criminal Defense Attorneys Association.

He has continued to teach at the University of Baltimore and the University of Maryland law schools, twice receiving an outstanding instructor award.

He is currently updating his Maryland Evidence Handbook for a second edition in November.

On the Court of Special Appeals, Judge Murphy would participate in three-judge panels reviewing the work of circuit judges throughout the state in criminal and civil cases, except for a few that go directly to the higher Court of Appeals.

He said he is looking forward to appellate court work.

"I've always enjoyed the research aspect of it and the writing — and trial judges don't have the time to do that."

"In fairness to people, the trial judge must make a ruling and deliver an oral opinion, while the appellate court . . . has time to research legal issues in depth and, hopefully, prepare a written opinion that will prove to be a valuable guide for trial lawyers and trial judges in future cases throughout the state."