

# Judge who started law career in her 30s nominated to state's high court

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Montgomery County Circuit Court Judge Irma S. Raker, who did not start law school until she was 32, was nominated yesterday to be the second woman to sit on the Court of Appeals, the state's highest court.

Gov. William Donald Schaefer's appointment to the seven-member bench was made public yesterday and must be confirmed by the state Senate. Assuming confirmation, Judge Raker would become the only jurist from Montgomery County on either of the state's two appellate courts.

Judge Raker, who is 55 and lives in Bethesda, would replace Judge John F. McAuliffe, 61, another Montgomery County resident, who plans to retire at the end of this year.

Rita C. Davidson, the first woman on the Court of Appeals, died in 1984.

Although the appointment appears to fulfill both demographic and gender needs, supporters say they believe Judge Raker won the \$99,000-a-year job on her own merits.

"I know the governor made this appointment because Irma Raker was the best qualified, regardless of where she happened to live or what her gender happened to be," said Del. Timothy F. Maloney, a Prince

George's Democrat, who has worked with Judge Raker over the years.

He called the confluence of circumstances "a happy coincidence."

"I'm delighted," said Del. Nancy K. Kopp, a Montgomery Democrat, who had written the governor in support of Judge Raker. "Even if she did not live in Montgomery County, I'd have to admit that she has one of the best minds and greatest senses of dedication to public service of any of the judges I have met."

The governor selected Judge Raker over two other candidates selected by the Appellate Judicial Nominating Commission: University of Maryland School of Law Professor Roger Wolfe and Allegany Circuit Court Administrative Judge J. Frederick Sharer.

Those who know and work with Judge Raker describe her as an intellectual jurist, well-suited to the research, reading and writing required on the Court of Appeals.

Mr. Maloney has worked with her on a committee to revise the state's criminal code. When an esoteric issue arose over arson law, Judge Raker researched statutes from around the country to see how other states addressed the matter, he said.

Supporters describe her as neither conservative nor liberal. Some cite a recent 30-year sentence she handed out for second-degree murder. But Andy Sonner, the Montgomery County state's attorney, says she

won't be afraid to reverse a conviction if the evidence supports it.

"She's not going to be one of those knee-jerk law-enforcement types," Mr. Sonner said.

Judge Raker was born in Brooklyn, N.Y., in 1938 and graduated from Syracuse University in 1959. She spent most of the 1960s raising her three children in Bethesda.

"I was biding my time," she said in a phone interview.

In 1969, she enrolled in the Washington College of Law of American University. Judge Raker said she and her husband, Samuel, found ways to balance family life and her studies. Sometimes she would take one of the children to school with

her. When she worked on the school's law review, Mr. Raker, a nuclear engineer, would take their children swimming.

After graduation, Mr. Sonner hired her as the first female prosecutor in the Montgomery state's attorney's office.

"She was a scholar right from the very beginning," Mr. Sonner said. "She was very quickly the lawyer in the office that the other lawyers went to for solid legal advice."

Then-Gov. Harry Hughes appointed her to the Circuit Court seat in 1982.