

The Sun

**City's top judge to put down gavel after 17 years in robes
Rinehardt, 69, helped start drug, domestic courts**

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The top judge of Baltimore's District Court will step down at the end of the month, leaving behind a 17-year legacy in the state's busiest courtrooms.

Judge Mary Ellen T. Rinehardt, 69, will retire Dec. 31. Her replacement has not yet been named.

Judge Martha F. Rasin, chief judge of Maryland's District Courts, said that Rinehardt will be missed. In her tenure, Rinehardt has helped create drug treatment courts and the domestic violence court. She oversees the city's 25 judges as well as the clerk's office and court commissioners.

Judge Rinehardt's "hallmark is common sense," Rasin said. "She is in charge of a pretty big machine and does a good job at it."

Rinehardt, who grew up in Prince George's County, was appointed to the district court bench in 1982 after 14 years with Baltimore's legal aid bureau, where she rose from staff attorney to chief of the litigation unit. She became administrative judge in 1991.

She has been a member of the Court of Appeals Standing Committee on Rules of Practice and Procedure, the National Association of Women Judges and the Women's Law Center.

Rinehardt, a 1968 graduate of the University of Baltimore School of Law, remembers being one of three women in her law school class. Since then, much has changed in the law profession.

Rinehardt helped create drug treatment courts that try to help people accused of drug crimes to kick their habit. Two years ago, she also set up the domestic violence court, where prosecutors refer women to shelters and send people who batter their spouses to counseling at the House of Ruth.

Rinehardt says she is proud of those two accomplishments.

"You feel like perhaps you are making a change for the better in someone's life," she said.

Rinehardt hopes to come back to the bench part time. But for now, she is thinking of taking "un-law" classes and going to Florida, where she has another home.

"It's just something I have been looking forward to," she said.

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