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**New leader for the District Courts
Sweeney's successor: Judge Rasin brings strong credentials to run courts.**

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MARTHA F. RASIN, named yesterday as chief of Maryland's District Courts, has run Anne Arundel's lower courts for less than a year. In that brief time, her talents as an administrator and judicial leader have been evident.

Chief Judge Robert F. Sweeney, who reached the mandatory retirement age this week and stepped down as head of the District Court system, tells of visiting courthouses in recent months to say goodbye to judges and workers. In Anne Arundel County, when he noted that Judge Rasin was being mentioned as a potential successor, the response was unanimous: "Oh no, don't take her away from us!"

The widespread enthusiasm that greeted Judge Rasin's appointment is a tribute to her abilities and integrity, and a sign of the importance of this post. A quarter-century ago, justice at the local level was administered haphazardly by some courts noted more for petty corruption than for justice.

Chief Judge Sweeney brought to the post a firm, even hand and what he proudly calls an "obsession with integrity." He leaves a system notably free of corruption and significantly fairer and more efficient. Judge Rasin brings an equally strong dedication to the principle of equal justice under the law. She also brings a sharp intellect, administrative ability and a gift for working with people -- traits that will enhance her leadership of a court system that touches citizens in every corner of the state.

Judge Rasin is respected as a thorough and thoughtful judge. But she has also won admirers for her work on sensitive issues like domestic violence. As part of a task force charged with helping implement a new state law on domestic violence, she was instrumental in designing user-friendly forms for protection orders and other court documents related to the law. She also helped help educate other judges on this important issue without casting herself as a partisan on either side of the debate.

The appointment of Judge Rasin, a seven-year veteran of the District Court, was one of the last official acts of Robert C. Murphy, chief judge of the Court of Appeals and head of Maryland's judiciary. It was a class act, one that sets high standards for Gov. Parris N. Glendening's choice of a successor to Chief Judge Murphy next month.

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