

The Sun

**Martha Rasin moved quickly to the top of Maryland's legal world
Favored candidate for job is awed by appointment**

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For more than a year, she had been considered a favorite to become chief judge of Maryland's District Court. And for 24 hours, she had known privately that the job was hers.

But when the appointment was made public yesterday, Judge Martha F. Rasin acknowledged she was a little overwhelmed.

"I'm still reeling," she told reporters. "I know I've been handed something precious today."

What Chief Judge Robert C. Murphy of the Court of Appeals handed her was control of the state's District Court -- the fast-moving, 100-judge system that gives most residents their only first-hand glimpse of local justice.

Friends call the 49-year-old Rasin a modest, even-tempered judge with the patience to hear the stories of even the lowliest of defendants appearing in her courtroom.

"Martha's middle name is patience," said Annapolis attorney Gill Cochran. "No one problem was too small for Martha to resolve if asked."

Added Bruce Bereano, the Annapolis lobbyist who practiced law with Rasin for six years in the 1980s: "She's a very down-to-earth person who immediately makes you feel at ease."

Her appointment to the chief judge's job marks the latest step in a fast rise to the top ranks of Maryland's legal world.

A native of Chestertown, she waited several years to begin law school after graduating from Mary Baldwin College in Virginia in 1969.

She held a variety of jobs during the interim, including waiting on tables, sign-painting and working as a legal secretary, between extended trips to Europe.

"I enjoyed my 20s," she said with a smile yesterday.

She didn't receive her law degree -- from the University of Baltimore -- until the relatively advanced age of 33.

After law school, she worked in Annapolis with Bereano, who at the time was the leading State House lobbyist. Rasin did no lobbying but handled a variety of legal matters, enjoying criminal work the most.

In 1987, she opened her Annapolis law firm, and two years later, then-Gov. William Donald Schaefer appointed her to Anne Arundel District Court. Last fall, the man she now is succeeding as chief judge, Robert F. Sweeney, made her the administrator of the seven-judge county bench overseeing courts in Annapolis and Glen Burnie.

Rasin becomes the first woman to hold one of the state's three top judicial positions, although she made no mention of the milestone until asked by a reporter.

Over the past few years, Rasin has developed a reputation as an expert in the state's domestic violence law enacted in 1992.

She said she intends to keep hearing cases, even as she assumes the administrative chores of her new position. While Sweeney sat only occasionally as a judge, Rasin said she hopes to make it a regular practice.

"I think it's a good way to keep in touch with what's going on," Rasin said. "I wouldn't have taken this job if it meant I couldn't keep sitting as a judge."

Rasin lives in downtown Annapolis, where she can be seen early mornings walking her beagle. She maintains a long-distance marriage to E. Blay Bryan, an attorney who practices in Richmond, Va.

The two spend many weekends fishing for bass and rockfish in the Sassafras River near his family's home in Kent County on the Eastern Shore.

Rasin is no stranger to politics. Before law school, she worked for then-Senate President Steny H. Hoyer, now a congressman.

She is a distant relation of I. Freeman Rasin, a 19th-century political boss in Baltimore, and two of her cousins have been judges -- District Judge Gale Rasin Caplan in Baltimore and retired Circuit Judge George B. Rasin Jr. of Kent County.

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