

## PROFILE

# Court has adjourned

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On Jan. 26, Maricopa County Superior Court Judge Barry Schneider tended to a bankruptcy-related dispute over attorneys' fees and resolved a fight between brothers over real estate. The day was far from typical.

In Schneider's words, it was his "last hurrah," after serving 21 years as a Maricopa County Superior Court trial judge. Family members including his 90-year-old mother, his wife, son and daughter-in-law were in court to observe him on the bench for the last time.

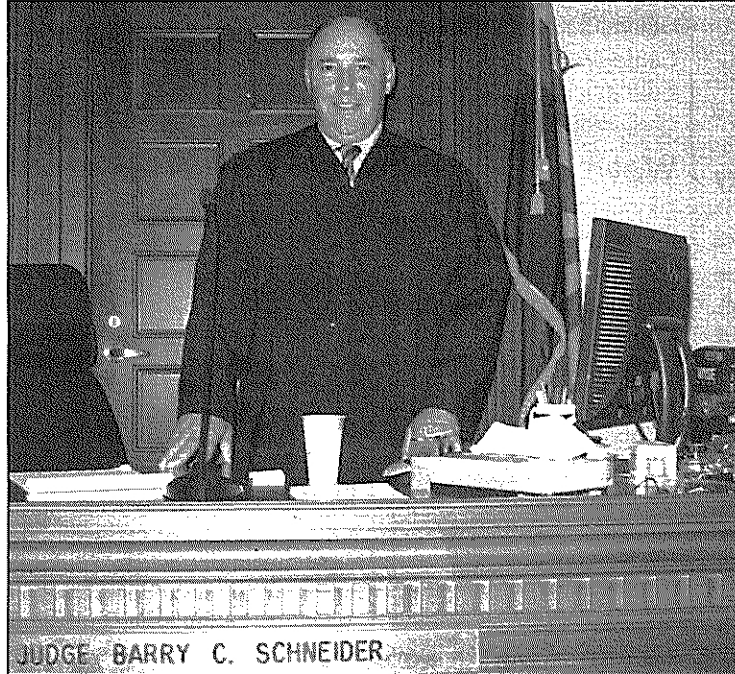
Schneider's final day in court was an emotional one.

"To quote Lou Gehrig, I am the luckiest man on the face of the Earth. I have a great family and a great job," he tells Jewish News as tears start to well up. "I've always felt honored and privileged to be appointed as a judge and for this wonderful opportunity for me to serve the people. I've loved every minute of it."

Schneider was appointed as judge of the Maricopa County Superior Court in 1986 by then-Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt.

When he applied for the position, he was concerned what toll the life of a judge might take on his wife and school-age children. He says his wife Willa, who worked with him in his law practice, was aware of the daily pressures. "Without her blessing, I probably would not have been liberated enough to do it."

He also says that friends like former judges Robert Myers and Noel Fidel helped him get through the rigorous application process.



**Recently retired Superior Court Judge Barry Schneider stands behind the bench on his final day in court.**

*Photo by Beth Shapiro*

"He has a passion for good lawyering and good judging," says Myers, who met Schneider when they worked together at the Phoenix law firm of Langerman, Begam and Lewis. "Barry was somebody who thought that once a case was filed, that the court owns the lawsuit, not the lawyers."

Fidel, who has been friends with Schneider for nearly 35 years, says in his 40 years since he entered law school, he has never known anyone who has had greater enthusiasm for the law. "Barry has always maintained a curious equilibrium between passion and reason, leavened with a very engaging sense of humor. You might say that he is a passionately sensible and a sensibly passionate man — about law and about life."

Schneider says that when he got to the bench, there were no settlement conferences. "After a year on the bench, I didn't even know I was allowed to do settlement conferences as a judge." He recalls he was picked during a judicial workshop to serve as the mediator for an actual settlement conference. It was an insignificant case that had a profound effect on Schneider's judicial career. "I successfully settled that case, and it really turned me on."

With approval from Fidel, then presiding judge of the civil division of the court, it was decided to introduce settlement conferences to Maricopa County Superior Court as a pilot project. That led to the adoption of a local court rule that allowed a judge or one party to a lawsuit to call for a settlement conference.

Schneider, a graduate of St. John's University of Law who moved to Phoenix in the early 1970s, grew up in the Bronx before his family moved to Long Island. "My grandmother lived across the street, my aunt lived down the street. We kept kosher. It was like living in a *shtetl*."

The Schneiders are members of Beth El Congregation in Phoenix. Daughter Danna is a union organizer in Michigan. Son Brian is an assistant attorney general at the Arizona Office of the Attorney General, representing the Department of Public Safety, and his wife Michelle is a law student at Phoenix School of Law. They are expecting their first child.

Schneider has not skipped a beat since stepping down from the bench. He has already opened his new business, Schneider Mediation, located in Phoenix.

"I don't have the pressure I had when I was a young lawyer, worrying about my kids, worrying about whether clients will call me," he says. "When people hire me to do mediation, I hope they will see that my efforts were effective and they'll hire me again. If not, I'll go somewhere and play golf."

Schneider's advice to new judges is to try to remember the moment when they got the call from the governor. "Judges should understand how lucky they are to serve the people. They should try very hard not to become arrogant or robotic."

To inquire about Schneider Mediation, call 602-308-7245 or e-mail [barryschneider@schneidermediation.com](mailto:barryschneider@schneidermediation.com).