

New year starts with two new judges

By [Natalie St. John](#)

Chinook Observer

Published on January 3, 2017 3:14PM



MARY GOELZ PHOTO

Doug Goelz, left, was sworn in last week as the new Pacific-Wahkiakum Superior Court judge by South Bend attorney Joel Penoyer, who formerly served in the same position before joining the Washington State Court of Appeals. Goelz replaces Michael Sullivan, who retired last month.

PACIFIC COUNTY — Pacific County is starting 2017 with two new judges.

In late December, former South District Court Judge Douglas Goelz was sworn in as the county's new Superior Court judge, and county commissioners appointed attorney Nancy McAllister to replace Goelz as SDC judge.

Goelz had served as SDC judge since 1988. He narrowly defeated opponent Michael Turner in the November General Election. He replaces veteran Superior Court Judge Michael Sullivan, who retired in December.

McAllister lost to Goelz in the 2014 race for SDC judge. When Goelz won the Superior Court race, however, commissioners had to appoint a new judge to finish Goelz's SDC term, which expires in 2018. McAllister applied again, along with Turner, and local attorney and judge Kris Kaino.

"Quite honestly, all three of them were perfectly good, qualified candidates. It was a hard decision," Commissioner Frank Wolfe said on Dec. 23. However, he would not give his reasons for choosing McAllister over the other two candidates.

"I'm not going to say. I think each of the three commissioners had their own reasons," Wolfe said, adding that he did not believe most members of the public want to know "how the sausage gets made."

Choosing McAllister

McAllister holds a masters degree in management and a J.D. from Willamette University. She has served as a public defender in local jurisdictions, and has owned a private practice on the Peninsula since 1992. In addition to her legal activities, McAllister has served on the board of Columbia Memorial Hospital, and as a volunteer with the Women's Resource Center in Astoria.

Each of the three SDC judge candidates submitted a CV, completed a questionnaire and participated in a 30-minute panel interview during a two-day selection process in late December, Wolfe said. The commissioners also considered calls and letters about the candidates. They then discussed the candidates in an executive session, before reconvening the following day to announce McAllister's appointment.

"We tried to keep it as equal as possible," Wolfe said. In Washington, executive sessions are closed to the public, and commissioners are only obligated to disclose the general reason for holding the session, and whether they made any formal decisions in session.

Wolfe did not detail how the decision was made except to say that he considered a variety of factors, including the candidates' qualifications and temperaments, familiarity with local systems and communities, and practical considerations, such as where the candidates live, and how each one's appointment might affect staffing in the North District and South District courts. Though he described the selection process as "very collegial," he hinted that, with so few attorneys in the county, he was wary of the political ramifications of saying why they chose McAllister.

"I have to now continue to deal with all three people, even the two that weren't particularly happy and I'd just as soon keep the relationship as it was," Wolfe explained. "... I don't think this process needs to be broadcast far and wide."

Wolfe said the commissioners were ultimately unanimous in their decision to appoint McAllister.

“On balance, I felt that Nancy was the best candidate, and apparently the other two commissioners felt the same way,” Wolfe said. “It was really, really close.”

Welcoming Goelz

Friends, family and local dignitaries packed the Pacific County Superior Courtroom during Goelz’s emotional swearing-in ceremony on Dec. 29. Among the guests were local law enforcement leaders, attorneys, courthouse staff and several members of Goelz’s family.

Former Superior Court Judge Joel Penoyar, who went on to serve on the Washington State Court of Appeals, officiated, in a ceremony that frequently had everyone in the courthouse laughing.

Penoyar pointed out that Goelz, a Long Beach resident, is more or less the first Peninsula resident to serve in Pacific County Superior Court. There was one other contender for that distinction — Judge Edward F. Hunter, who served in the late 1800s. However, Penoyar said, Hunter served for both Lewis and Pacific counties, and he was “a sketchy character at best.” Penoyar read a quote from one of Hunter’s contemporaries, who described him as “a brow-beating, swaggering type.” And, Penoyar noted, Hunter had once been involved in a gunfight in Sonora over a mining dispute, before he came to Pacific County to set up a law practice.

“We don’t want him to be the only judge from the beach!” Penoyar said. Growing more serious, Penoyar said it was tradition to offer the incoming judge some good advice, but after 35 years of working with Goelz, he wasn’t sure what he could say that he hadn’t said already.

“I don’t have a lot of advice,” Penoyar said. “... You’re like a lifeguard. You can’t save every swimmer, but you can push them toward shore.”

Goelz speaks

Standing in front of the bench, Penoyar swore Goelz in, and then Goelz’s wife, Mary Goelz, helped him put on his robe.

As he took his place in the judge’s seat, Goelz joked that he had to lift up his robe to avoid tripping on it.

“My philosophy is to do everything the women in my life tell me to do!” Goelz said, but he soon grew serious. After pausing to gather his thoughts, Goelz gave a moving tribute to his family members, beginning with a poignant description of his mother’s devotion and high standards.

“I have been surrounded by excellence my entire life,” Goelz said. He recalled how, after he flunked the fifth and sixth grades, his mother began diplomatically suggesting that he consider vocational school. But his siblings went on to significant career success in research and law, and Goelz too eventually realized that he wanted to go to college.

Goelz praised his siblings and daughter for their professional accomplishments, before describing Mary Goelz as “a great wife, a better friend, the very best of mothers,” and a devoted supporter of his campaigns. He also thanked his long-time SDC staff for their service.

“What amazes me is how much excellence there is in this county,” Goelz said. “It is an honor to serve this county.”