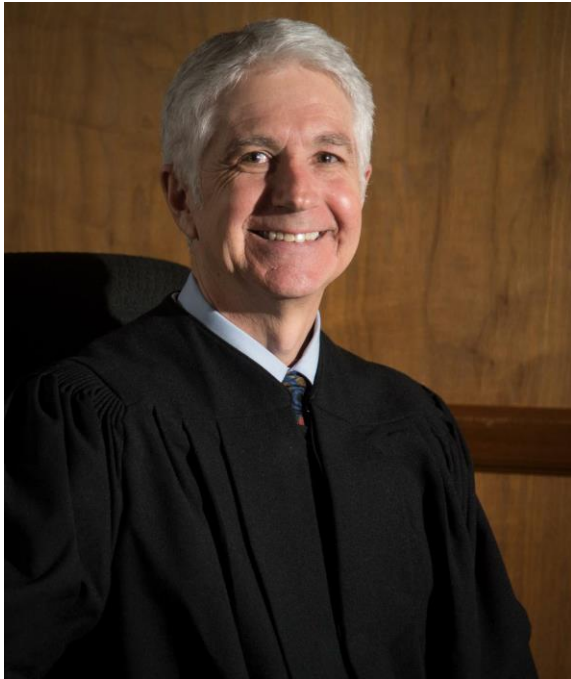


Fennessy gets fast start to new career as Superior Court judge

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Spokane County Superior Court Judge Timothy Fennessy recently his four-year term as a judge after beating sitting Judge Greg Sypolt in the November election. (Colin Mulvany / The Spokesman-Review)

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While it may be difficult to be called a rookie at age 59, Tim Fennessy said his fellow judges have gone overboard make his transition easier to the Spokane County Superior Court bench.

Fennessy already has presided over his first trial and is settling into his new digs on the third floor of the historic Spokane County Courthouse.

“Everything is going really great,” Fennessy said earlier this month. “Obviously, it’s a big change. But it’s a change I feel like I’m ready for.”

Fennessy takes over at a difficult time for the court as it deals with the loss of Judge Sam Cozza, who died Jan. 14 from complications following heart surgery.

Cozza was two years ahead of Fennessy at Gonzaga University and Fennessy argued many cases before him.

“By the time the election results were known, he was battling health issues,” Fennessy said. “So, I didn’t get to spend as much time as a judicial officer as I would have enjoyed and benefitted so much from.”

Cozza “obviously was a well-loved Spokaneite and member of the bench,” Fennessy said. “We all know how much we will miss him.”

Fennessy took office by beating another longtime judge, Greg Sypolt, in the November election. Sypolt had served on the bench since he was appointed in 1996. Sypolt did not respond to a request for an interview.

“I want to say thanks to the community and thanks to Judge Sypolt for his 20 years on the bench,” Fennessy said.

After a whirlwind orientation, Fennessy already has jumped in with both feet and presided over his first criminal trial. The defendant, who was charged with unlawful imprisonment, was acquitted.

“The lawyers were very professional, and they did their jobs without direction,” he said. “Nothing blew up that I wasn’t prepared for.”

Criminal cases are new for an attorney who spent his entire career working on civil cases. Fennessy said he’s worked on everything from personal injury to massive medical malpractice suits.

“I’ve work with and against some of the best lawyers in the state of Washington because of those cases,” he said.

Presiding over other attorneys comes natural, he said.

“It’s management of the court room in a completely different way,” he said. “Instead of managing to the advantage of a client, I’m managing to the advantage of justice.”

The native of Libby, Mont., graduated from Gonzaga University School of Law in 1983 and has made Spokane his home for the past 33 years. He is married and has a daughter in law school and a son attending Whitman College.

“All the other judges have been good. They have given me their direct lines and let me know they are here to help if something blows up,” he said. “I’m excited to be here.”