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Former prosecutor becomes youngest U.S. trial judge

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The comments of the people who recommended Edmond E. Chang for a position as a judicial law clerk were repetitious, according to the judge who hired him.

"Each reference used the same word, 'best,' to describe Ed's work," U.S. District Judge Marvin E. Aspen said Thursday.

And Aspen said the justice system and the people it serves were getting the best with Chang's appointment to the federal trial court in Chicago.

Aspen spoke to the friends, relatives and other well-wishers who gathered at the Dirksen Federal Courthouse for Chang's investiture.

Aspen administered the oath to Chang while his wife, Jeannie, held the Bible.

The Changs' daughters, Emily, 10, and Claire, 6 — who had sung "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" earlier in the ceremony — stood with their parents.

Other family members who attended the investiture included Chang's parents, Esther and Lawrence Chang.

Also present were Jeannie Chang's parents, Shun-Yu and Chen-Kun Tiao.

Speakers at the ceremony said Chang, whose parents emigrated from Taiwan, is the first Asian-American to serve as an Article III judge on the federal trial bench in Illinois.

Chang, 40, also is the youngest judge currently serving on a federal trial court in the United States, according to speakers.

The speakers uniformly described Chang as an intelligent and hard-working man with the kind of temperament and lack of ego needed to dispense justice efficiently and fairly.

Chicago attorney Andrew D. Wang of Wang, Kobayashi, Austin LLC said Chang also was "mature beyond his age.

Wang, a college and law school classmate, moved Chang's admission to the bench.

Now-retired Judge James L. Ryan of the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said Chang's talents were evident when he served as Ryan's law clerk.

"Ed's star glistened as brightly as any and brighter than most," Ryan said.

But professor Leonard S. Rubinowitz of Northwestern University School of Law said Chang did have one fault.

"If truth be told, Ed is a complainer," Rubinowitz said with his tongue planted in his cheek.

Rubinowitz said Chang after graduating noted that the law school did not offer a class in litigating civil rights cases, which make up a big chunk of federal judges' dockets.

He challenged Chang to do something about the situation, Rubinowitz said.

Rubinowitz said Chang has been teaching such a course ever since.

When it came his turn to speak, Chang choked up occasionally as he thanked the people he said were responsible for his success.

Those people included his parents, who uprooted themselves to come to the United States in search of a better life, Chang said.

Chang also said he could not have come as far as he did without his wife's help.

"Jeannie is the most amazing person I ever met," Chang said.

Chang said mentors who helped him in his legal career included Aspen, Ryan and another former boss, U.S. Attorney Patrick J. Fitzgerald of the Northern District of Illinois.

And Chang said he was inspired by the late Sandra R. Otaka, the first Asian-American to be elected as a Cook County Circuit Court judge.

Chang earned a degree in aerospace engineering in 1990 at the University of Michigan and a law degree in 1994 at Northwestern.

After earning his law degree, Chang clerked first for Ryan and then for Aspen.

Chang next joined the Chicago office of the law firm now called Sidley, Austin LLP.

In 1999, Chang joined the U.S. attorney's office. He served in a variety of positions, including chief of appeals for the office's Criminal Division.

Last year, President Barack Obama nominated Chang to fill the vacancy on the bench created when U.S. District Judge Elaine Bucklo took senior status.

The U.S. Senate unanimously confirmed Chang's nomination in December.

At Thursday's ceremony, Fitzgerald said the qualities that made Chang an excellent federal prosecutor would make him an excellent judge.

"He's a terrific lawyer and an exceedingly decent person," Fitzgerald said.

Fitzgerald said Chang worked odd hours — sometimes sending out work-related e-mails in the middle of the night — not because he was disorganized but because he had arranged his schedule so he could spend time with his family.

Chief U.S. District Judge James F. Holderman said Chang's work habits apparently had not changed since he took the judicial oath in an informal ceremony several weeks ago.

Chang sent him an e-mail early one morning during a holiday weekend, Holderman said.

Holderman said he responded to the message with the comment, "Ed, you have life tenure."
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