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Santa Clara County Superior Court judge named vice provost for campus relations

LaDoris Hazzard Cordell, a veteran judge in Santa Clara County and a 1974 Stanford Law School graduate, has been named vice provost and special counselor to the president for campus relations, effective March 1, President John Hennessy announced Friday.

Cordell was selected following a nationwide search co-chaired by Robert Weisberg, vice provost for faculty relations, and John Cammidge, director of human resources. She succeeds Sally Dickson, who resigned last summer to become vice president for institutional equity at Duke University.

"Almost 20 years ago, LaDoris Cordell left her job at Stanford to start her career as a judge. In the ensuing time, she has not only distinguished herself on the bench, she has become a noted community leader and impassioned advocate for social justice," Hennessy said.

"The university is indeed fortunate that she now will return to us to share her deep intelligence, breadth of experience and boundless energy in this extremely important role. I believe she is an ideal choice to lead the Office of Campus Relations and I am proud to have her join the university's senior leadership as we strive to make Stanford an even better place for its students and staff."

Weisberg said Cordell's set of skills and experience were "beyond what we could reasonably have hoped for in this search. "In both her judicial work and her vast and varied public and civic service more generally, she's shown she can build trust into organizations and make them both more efficient and more humane. There isn't a social or institutional problem that she hasn't faced or a conflict she hasn't had to resolve in one way or another, and the things that have made her a great jurist -- old-fashioned judgment, compassion and pragmatic wisdom -- have shone through everywhere. Combine those with her long history with and commitment to Stanford, and it becomes clear why she was the choice."

Cordell, 51, was appointed the first African American female judge in Northern California in 1982. She served on the Municipal Court of Santa Clara County until 1988, when she won a county-wide election to become the first African American Superior Court judge in Santa Clara County. After almost 20 years on the bench -- when judges are eligible to retire -- Cordell said she is ready to try something new.

"It's been a wonderful job," she said. "But when I look at the work I have done, I'm ready for a change." In her new position, Cordell said she will be able to "return to Stanford, be involved in education and continue working as a volunteer judge."

The vice provost for campus relations reports directly to the president and oversees five offices that deal with quality of life and equity issues. These include the Office for Multicultural Development, which includes ADA Compliance; the Ombudsperson's Office; the Sexual Harassment Policy Office; the Help Center; and the WorkLife Office.

Cordell has had administrative experience on campus. From 1978 to 1982, she was assistant dean for student affairs at the Law School. During her tenure she implemented a minority admissions program that resulted in Stanford Law School becoming the leading school in the country for enrolling minority students. Cordell has remained an active alumna, speaking on alumni panels and participating as a member of the school's Board of Visitors, which advises the dean on a range of issues. "I'm not a stranger to campus," she said.

As vice provost for campus relations, Cordell said she wants to build a stronger link between the administration and its employees. "The message I get from Hennessy is that this is important to him too," she said. "I like him. He's a forthright, honest person. He cares about the quality of life for everyone on campus: staff, faculty and students."

In addition to her new job, Cordell plans to develop and teach a course on judging for Law School students. The class will include hands-on training for second- and third-year students who will assist Cordell as she works as a volunteer judge for small claims court appeals in Santa Clara County. "There is no class like this in the country," she said. Cordell wants to help expose students to what she calls "the highest position in the judiciary," yet one that "has been trivialized by the judge shows on television. You can't have a more serious job."

As a judge, Cordell established a reputation for finding creative solutions to problems. In 1987, she became the first judge in California to order convicted drunk drivers to install breath detectors in their cars. In the early 1990s, Cordell devised a supervised visitation project, the first of its kind in California, where she trained senior citizens to monitor court-ordered visits between children and non-custodial parents at senior citizen centers. And in 1994, Cordell created the Guardianship Review and Evaluation Assessment Team (GREAT) Project, in which senior citizens were trained to monitor children placed in court-ordered guardianships in Santa Clara County.

Cordell also has been active in community service in and has received numerous awards. A native of Ardmore, Pa., she lives in Palo Alto and has two grown daughters and a granddaughter. Cordell earned her bachelor's degree from Antioch College in 1971 and is a recognized artist.

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By Lisa Trei