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Valencia Judge Makes History

By Christi Anne Corpus
Signal Staff Writer

Longtime Valencia resident Graciela Freixes made history as the first Cuban-American woman named as a Superior Court judge in California when Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed her as one of six new judges in the Los Angeles Superior Court last week.

"The reason I went into law was because I wanted to be a judge. That was my impetus for going into law after college," Freixes, 51, said.

As a student at California State University, Northridge, Freixes worked as a translator at the then Burbank Municipal Court, where she witnessed some of the first women judges overseeing court trials and taking command of their courtrooms.

"I remember one night I was sitting in court translating during a lengthy criminal hearing and I thought, 'This is what I want to do with my life. I want to sit where she's sitting,'" she added.

Born in Havana, Cuba, Freixes came to the United States with her family in 1962 as a Cuban refugee before settling in California, where she eventually attended CSUN and then went on to graduate from Loyola Law School.

Freixes combined her passion for law with her initial interest in medicine as a medical malpractice attorney for more than 20 years.

Freixes was elected as a commissioner for the Los Angeles Superior Court in 2005 and was appointed to the Central Civil Courthouse in downtown Los Angeles for more than a year before presiding over the misdemeanor arraignment court at the San Fernando Courthouse.

"Criminal practice was something new to me until I sat in San Fernando," she said. "Because it was so incredibly busy, you learn really fast. You do so much every day and I came to enjoy it very much."

Freixes will now preside over misdemeanor and felony cases at the Santa Clarita Courthouse, a job she is openly enthusiastic about.

"I hope to bring a different perspective, certainly a different face," she said. "I am Hispanic and I am a woman, and if you ever come into my court, you'll notice I begin by saying, 'Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Buenos dias señoras and señores.'

"What I hope to do is be an inspiration for some girl sitting in the audience the same way (other women judges) were an inspiration to me when I was in college," she continued. "I like to see a lot of little girls, and little girls not born in this country, say, 'She's got a funny name. My name is unusual too. I guess maybe it's OK and I can do that also.'"