

NEWS RELEASE

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO



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SAN FRANCISCO TRIAL LAWYERS ASSOCIATION NAMES JUDGE CHRISTINE VAN AKEN "JUDGE OF THE YEAR"

*Presiding Judge Rochelle C. East also honored for her
leadership of the Court*



Judge Christine Van Aken (right) with her Judge of the Year award and Doris Cheng (left).



Presiding Judge Rochelle C. East (left) and Judge Van Aken (right) at the SFTLA Judges Awards Dinner.

SAN FRANCISCO — The San Francisco Trial Lawyers Association (SFTLA) named Judge Christine Van Aken of the Superior Court of California, County of San Francisco, its Judge of the Year. She received the award Friday, October 9, at the association's annual Judges Awards Dinner at the Westin St. Francis in San Francisco.

In introducing Judge Van Aken, the association praised her integrity, empathy, intellectual rigor, and work ethic. She was described as a judge who asks hard questions while making sure everyone in her courtroom is heard and treated with respect. The association also noted that her colleagues on the bench, including some who have served longer than she has, describe her as a mentor.

"I'm grateful for this recognition from the lawyers who appear in our courtrooms every day," said Judge Van Aken. "Everyone who comes to court deserves to be heard and to understand the decisions that affect them. I work to make sure of that in every case, and I'm fortunate to serve alongside colleagues who do the same."

Judge Van Aken was appointed to the Court by Governor Jerry Brown in 2018. She has since presided over civil law and motion, felony and misdemeanor trials, and preliminary hearings. Before her appointment, she spent most of her career in the San Francisco City Attorney's Office, most recently as Chief of Appellate Litigation. While at the City Attorney's Office, she argued before the U.S. Supreme Court, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, and the California Court of Appeal. Earlier in her career, she clerked for Judge Pierre N. Leval of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit and for U.S. Supreme Court Justice David H. Souter. She holds a law degree from New York University School of Law and a bachelor's degree from Harvard University.

The association also presented Presiding Judge Rochelle C. East with a special award recognizing her leadership of the Court. Judge East has served as Presiding Judge since January 2025. In that role, she leads the Court's judges and assigns them across its divisions. She also sets the Court's policies and directs its resources, working with the Court Executive Officer to make the Court accessible, fair, and efficient for the public.

"I'm grateful to the association for this recognition," said Presiding Judge East. "I share this honor with the judges and staff of this Court, who serve the people of San Francisco every day. I'm especially proud to see Judge Van Aken honored. She is fair, prepared, and patient with everyone who comes before her, and she is the kind of colleague every judge hopes to have down the hall."

Judge East was appointed to the Court by Governor Jerry Brown in 2013. She has presided over more than 100 jury trials and more than 400 bench trials, with assignments spanning criminal, civil, and juvenile dependency courtrooms, among others. Before her appointment to the bench, she was a civil litigator and managing attorney in the California Attorney General's Office. She later served as Chief Deputy of the California Department of Justice, responsible for more than 5,000 employees and a \$1 billion budget. Before becoming a lawyer, she served 10 years as a U.S. Navy officer, including tours as war briefer for two four-star commanders during Operation Desert Storm. She holds a law degree from the University of San Francisco School of Law and undergraduate degrees from Stanford University.

The SFTLA is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that has served its members for more than 70 years. Its mission is to promote civil justice through education and trial advocacy, with a focus on practical continuing legal education. Members include plaintiffs' and defense attorneys, law students, and law office staff. The association has presented its Judge of the Year award since 1977.

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