

YOU ARE HERE: [HOME](#) / [NEWS](#) / [NATIONAL NEWS](#) / SCHWARZENEGGER APPOINTS NISHIGAYA AS SANTA CLARA SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE

## Schwarzenegger Appoints Nishigaya as Santa Clara Superior Court Judge

February 4, 2010 by [By Erin Yasuda Soto, Nichi Bei Weekly](#)

[Like](#) Be the first of your friends to like this.

As a child growing up in Orange County, Daniel Nishigaya never imagined that one day he would be a Superior Court judge.

Nishigaya, of Sunnyvale, Calif., who was previously a supervising deputy district attorney for the Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office, was one of six appointed to a judgeship in the Santa Clara County Superior Court by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Dec. 29. Nishigaya fills the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Catherine Gallagher.

"I felt truly honored and grateful for the opportunity to serve that the governor has given me. It was very satisfying to receive the recognition and vote of confidence an appointment represents. But of course I realize it comes with great responsibility and expectation and there is much work ahead of me," Nishigaya said, via e-mail.

Nishigaya, 39, who began working as a deputy district attorney in 1996, said he is excited about his new role as a judge. His annual salary is \$178,789.

"Every moment of every day presents a new challenge. Right now, my focus is seeking to master the rules of law and procedure that apply to my current assignment presiding over misdemeanor cases. Despite having spent my career in criminal practice, it is still quite a change to assume a new role as judge," he said.

Richard Konda, executive director of the Asian Law Alliance in San Jose, said that Nishigaya's appointment is significant to the Asian American community.

"It's always a good sign when the judiciary branch reflects the diversity of the community, the Asian American community. It instills confidence in the system, that the system will be fair," he said.

Nishigaya, a fourth-generation Japanese American of German, English and Swiss descent, said that he feels honored to represent the Asian American community.

"I am proud of my Japanese American heritage and the fact that it accompanies me to the bench. I hope my actions will always live up to the hopes and expectations of those who find my appointment significant," he said.

Santa Clara County District Attorney Dolores Carr, who worked with Nishigaya for more than a decade, said he is an asset to the Santa Clara County Superior Court.

"Dan Nishigaya is a great addition to the Santa Clara County Superior Court. During his 13 years as a deputy district attorney, Dan was an exceptional prosecutor and supervisor. His strong knowledge of the law, patience and fairness will serve our community well," she said, via e-mail.

Nishigaya said that his years as a prosecutor have served him well in his new position as a judge.

"Prosecutors should seek only to do what is right and just under the law. They should seek to fully protect the rights of the accused as well as the rights and interests of any individual victim and the community at large. I feel working with that mindset for the last 13 years helped prepare me for the bench.

"Also, I was fortunate during my career as a prosecutor to handle cases that were complex, both legally and emotionally. The cases challenged me to think deeply about the rule of law and the concept of justice," he said.

As a deputy district attorney, Nishigaya prosecuted such high-profile cases as that of a San Martin father who accidentally left his baby to die in a hot car in 2001. Nishigaya filed charges against the man, whose



Daniel Nishigaya photo courtesy of California Governor's Press Office

5-month-old infant died after he went into a relative's home to play video games. A jury convicted the father of involuntary manslaughter.

Nishigaya said that he decided to go into the field of law after taking classes from an inspirational professor at Amherst College, where he received a bachelor's degree.

"I didn't become interested in law until I was an undergraduate at Amherst College. After learning from and working with Professor Austin Sarat, I fell in love with the study of law, legal theory and jurisprudence. I began to appreciate the power and importance of law in our lives. That led me to law school, and ultimately to a career in law," he said.

Nishigaya, who went on to receive his juris doctorate degree from the Santa Clara University School of Law, has been teaching law at his alma mater since 2003.

"I love interacting with students as they formulate their career paths and create their professional identities. It is most rewarding when I feel that I have helped a student embrace a lifetime of deep, conscientious, compassionate and critical thinking, because that is when I think a student is ready to give the legal profession what it deserves in a lawyer. To see former students practicing law admirably is very rewarding, too," Nishigaya said.

The *Nikkei* said that minorities who wish to pursue careers in the field of law should be prepared to put in lots of hard work.

"I would advise minorities seeking careers in the legal field to, of course, work hard — be the best you can be at what you do, because so much of it starts and ends right there. Seek out and find good mentors, and there are many who are willing to help. Get involved in law student or legal minority bar associations," he said.

Nishigaya said that his strong work ethic was instilled in him by his parents as a boy growing up in Orange County.

"My childhood was one in which I was comfortable and supported. I was raised by two loving, strong parents who were a tremendous influence on me. My father is a family practice physician, a man of principle and unmatched work ethic, who dedicated his life to helping people through the practice of medicine. My mother is a life-long community volunteer with a tremendous interest and respect for diversity and culture," said Nishigaya, whose mother is from Bloomington, Ill., and whose father was born and raised in Honolulu.

Nishigaya's great-grandfather, Masakichi Nishigaya, came from Japan to Hawai'i around 1890, and his great-grandmother, Kiyo Wakita, is said to have been one of the first Japanese Americans born in Hawai'i.

Nishigaya said that being a judge and prosecutor have both been fulfilling roles in that they have allowed him to serve the community.

"One of the most rewarding aspects of both jobs is simply the sense that your work is helping people and the community. At the end of each day, knowing you did everything you could with your professional skills to achieve a just result under the law, and knowing that those efforts contribute to the maintenance of our legal system and our democracy, is a great reward," he said.

---

Filed Under: [National News](#) Tagged With: [judiciary](#), [Santa Clara](#), [South Bay](#)

[Upvote](#)

[Share](#)

[Upvote](#)

[Tweet](#)