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Japanese Judge Gets Law Lesson in Lowell

6/18/07--A BC LAW PROGRAM THAT BRINGS JUDGES FROM FOREIGN COUNTRIES TO STUDY THE US LEGAL SYSTEM IS HIGHLIGHTED IN A LOWELL SUN ARTICLE.

FROM: LOWELL SUN
SECTION: STATE AND REGIONAL NEWS


Jun. 12--LOWELL -- In one day on the bench, Judge Akiko Saito saw a drunken-driving trial, a man arraigned for indecent exposure and the request for a speedy trial from a man accused of raping a woman with a crowbar.

An average day in the criminal session in Lowell Superior Court, but very different from what Saito normally sees in a civil court in Tokyo, Japan.

Saito spent last Wednesday shadowing Lowell Superior Court Judge Paul Chernoff as part of a Boston College program in which one Japanese judge each year is selected as a visiting scholar.

Since last July, the 30-year-old judge has been attending Boston College Law School, taking courses to learn about the United States' judicial system as Japan embarks on a judicial makeover in two years, when the country institutes jury trials.

"It is a big difference," Saito said.

During the final month of her visit, Saito has sat side-by-side with judges in Lowell, Middlesex and Suffolk superior courts to see the judicial system in action.

Chernoff joked that Saito wanted to see how "real justice" is dispensed in the Massachusetts courts.

He praised Saito for being "courageous" to live in a foreign country for a year. What amazed Chernoff about the Japanese system, he said, is that every couple of years, a judge can be reassigned to a court anywhere in the country.

Saito explained that after passing the bar in Japan, lawyers can chose to go to school to be a judge. That education is continued for the next five years, during which a new judge must sit with two other experienced judges.

Saito, who has only been a civil judge for about 3 1/2 years, said she chose to become a judge because she feels she has a "neutral quality" essential for fairness.

As for her time in Massachusetts, Saito said, "I've learned a lot. It's a good experience learning the legal system in another country, comparing the similarities and differences."