

Jeffrey appointed North Slope Superior Judge

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Tundra Times

Mike Jeffrey, a Legal Service Corp. attorney for Barrow for the past five years, last week was named to be the first Superior Court Judge for the North Slope.

Jeffrey, who established the Legal Services office in Barrow and who had strong backing from many North Slope Organizations, was appointed by

Gov. Jay Hammond over Tim Stearns, a private practice attorney from Anchorage.

Jeffrey is a 37-year-old graduate of Yale Law School who has worked in Legal Service-type organizations since his graduation from law school. He also spent five years following a severe accident, working with poor and needy people in India.

He returned from India in

1976 and began searching for a similar setting to apply his legal skills. He said he first sought legal work on Lower 48 Indian reservations but applied for a job in Alaska on advice of a friend. He was offered the job of setting up the Barrow office and, after a trip to Barrow, accepted the job.

Jeffrey has worked in Barrow since 1977 and was the

first Legal Services representative to travel to the remote North Slope villages to do legal work. He said he plans on doing the same in his new job.

His appointment to the Superior Court Bench came last week after several months of interviews and questionnaires about Jeffrey's qualifications and experience.

Despite the fact that he was the favorite in the two-

man race, he is taken aback by the appointment.

"I'm real excited . . . that's all I can say. The response to my candidacy has been so warm, especially after the announcement was made that I was named."

Jeffrey, who has been deeply involved in local community affairs said he was gratified that the "governor" clearly

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New judge says laws need local relevance

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followed the wishes of the local people and not imposed an outside system on them."

The ceremony to swear him in as a new judge will be held in Barrow at 12:30 p.m. Dec. 3 and will involve the Barrow Dancers and a local singing group. Jeffrey is a member of the Presbyterian Church Choir and frequently travels with the Barrow Dancers. He is a member of the Dancers and has taken Eskimo Dancing lessons for years.

Because of that involvement, he said he is hopeful that there will be an Eskimo dance

that night. He said there are discussions of holding such a celebration "which is right on the mark for what I hope this to be."

Jeffrey said he hopes to spend two weeks after swearing in watching a Superior Court Judge in another small court such as Kenai or Nome "to see how they run the courtroom. There is no Superior Court in Barrow now and judges from outside the area must travel to Barrow to preside when the need arises.

One priority of the new judge's — and he says with humor "Call me Mike unless we are in court in session —"

is to make the Alaska legal statutes more relevant to the local people.

"I'm operating under the belief that state law can be made relevant to the Inupiat . . . that it doesn't need to be some foreign institution imposed on them.

"It should be able to serve their needs as far as it allows for the development of their cultural activities."

Jeffrey said that "in times when it isn't practical to make the statutes relevant to the people up here at least we can make the people understand why we are doing what we are

doing."

Another concern of prime importance, said Jeffrey, is the inclusion of translators in the courtroom.

"I had a man call me today and tell me he would be glad to serve on a jury but he would need an interpreter. That is real important up here and I hope we can work to provide that service," he said.

His new duties mean that he can preside over any sort of trial on the North Slope except for federal trials.

He said that any judge can be "pre-empted" which means an attorney on either side of

an issue can ask for another judge without stating his reason but that he doesn't expect a lot of that "at least until they can feel me out to find out what kind of judge I am."

The speed with which the process to have him sworn in was somewhat astounding to the new judge.

"Governor Hammond called me on Thursday morning to tell me the news and that afternoon people were calling me for measurements for my robe and asking what kind of material I wanted it to be."

He said his parents and older brother will try to make the trip to see him sworn in.