

Maryland Lawyer

News and analysis of legal matters in Maryland

With Chasanow, JAMS spreads to Md.

Sweeney to join new Greenbelt center next month

BY DANIELLE ULMAN

Danielle.Ulman@TheDailyRecord.com

Retired Judge Howard S. Chasanow's mediation practice became so popular over the last decade that he could no longer handle the caseload.

"I was booked several months in advance and had waiting lists for months," he said.

Rather than turn clients away, Chasanow decided to look for a partner to help him with the operational aspects of running his practice. He turned to JAMS, a California-based alternative dispute resolution provider with 23 centers around the country, including one in Washington, D.C.

Last week, JAMS opened its first Maryland office in Greenbelt. It's not a coincidence, said Kimberly Taylor, the service's vice president and associate counsel.

JAMS had considered opening a Maryland office for the past few years, and it all came together when Chasanow contacted them, Taylor said.

"Greenbelt is where his practice was so that's where we are," she said.

Taylor said the company is not concerned about the Greenbelt and D.C. offices overlapping. It expects the Prince George's County office to draw clients from Baltimore, Annapolis, Howard County and the Eastern Shore.

In February, the office will welcome retired Judge Dennis M. Sweeney to its staff, and more judges are expected to sign on, although JAMS is tight-lipped about their identities.

Sweeney, who retired from the **Howard County Circuit Court** in November 2007 after 16 years on the bench, said he could not turn down Chasanow's offer.

"Howard Chasanow called me and when Howard Chasanow calls you it's sort of like Ray Lewis calling and asking if you want to join the **Ravens**," Sweeney



Former Court of Appeals Judge Howard K. Chasanow (left) joined JAMS last week; former Howard County Circuit Judge Dennis M. Sweeney will join him, but will still hear court cases by special assignment.

said. "Howard's a giant in the field of mediation in Maryland and JAMS is big in mediation nationwide."

The judge brings to the office his experience doing arbitration, territory Chasanow does not stray into.

Sweeney, the judge who heard the criminal case against former Baltimore mayor Sheila Dixon last year, said he will continue to hear court cases by special assignment. It was an important detail for him to agree to sign on with JAMS.

JAMS has a "sweet set up" in Greenbelt, Sweeney said. The space, in Capital Office Park, includes several comfortable rooms for mediation and arbitration.

"When you're doing mediation, you usually have two sides who often don't want to be in the room together," he said. "You want to have a comfortable space where people don't feel like they're cramped."

Chasanow, admired for his intelli-

gence and ability to make peace, retired from the bench in 1999 after 10 years at the **Maryland Court of Appeals** and nearly 30 as a judge.

"I loved being a trial judge. I don't miss the Court of Appeals," he said. "I'm much more of a people person."

Being a mediator "is just wonderful," Chasanow said. "I've never done anything as gratifying, as satisfying in helping people resolve their own cases."

Chasanow said many people have the wrong idea about mediation, which is meant to keep cases from overburdening a stressed judicial system and save people money on legal fees by avoiding trials.

"The phrase I hate most is 'Good mediation is when both sides walk out equally unhappy,'" he said. "A good mediation is when people walk out understanding they've reached a fair compromise."