Most Appreciated

Two decades hearing appeals has made Ignazio Ruvolo a popular neutral.

By Malcolm Maclachlan
Daily Journal Staff Writer

Ignazio J. Ruvolo said he’s been booked up since joining JAMS last year, but he’s not taking anything for granted. “It could be the market is still shaking me out. I don’t know,” said Ruvolo, who is better known as “Nace” to many in the legal community.

Or it could be that even among the experienced attorneys and retired judges who make up neutral panels, it’s rare for someone to come to the job after 22 years on the appellate bench.

“It’s clear from his workload he is most appreciated,” said Nanci E. Nishamura, a partner with Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy LLP in Burlingame who said she brought Ruvolo one of his first cases at JAMS. “My firm has regularly called upon him.”

“He was quite an honorable, hardworking blue collar man,” Ruvolo said. “I admired him a great deal.”

Ruvolo graduated from Rutgers University but soon felt the urge to “get out of Jersey” and “come west.” After all, he added, it was 1969. “It was a time when it was The Beach Boys and The Mamas and the Papas and everybody was singing about life in California,” Ruvolo said. “I took the bait.”

Decades later, Ruvolo made his own small mark on the West Coast counter culture when he ruled a burned man could not sue the Burning Man festival. He wrote the plaintiff knowingly assumed risk when he walked very close to the flames and tripped at the climax of the annual event in the Nevada desert in 2005.

Beninati v. Black Rock City, 2009 DJDAR 9723.

The case did involve a novel legal issue: Could the festival’s attorneys invoke a law more commonly cited by organizers of extreme sporting events? Ruvolo ruled the law applied. The California Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal.

Probably his most famous case on the bench, however, involved California’s high school exit exam. Writing for a unanimous court, Ruvolo reversed a lower court injunction and found the exam did not discriminate against minority students. O’Connell
He added that his wife, Barbara, also performs and is a much better singer than he is. Ruvolo has four grandchildren from his two adult children from an earlier marriage.

“They’re both biologists,” Ruvolo said. “No lawyers. I’m hoping the gene passes down to one of my grandchildren.”

Here are some attorneys who have used Ruvolo’s services:

Simona A. Agnolucci, Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP; Marc A. Eisenhart, Gates Eisenhart Dawson; Allison Lane, Duane Morris LLP; Barbara A. Lawless, Lawless & Lawless; James A. Murphy, Murphy, Pearson, Bradley & Feeney; Nanci E. Nishimura, Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy; Elise R. Sanguinetti, Arias Sanguinetti Wang & Torrijos LLP.

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