

No-nonsense jurist known as fair, patient

Chicago Tribune (IL) - March 3, 2005

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In the aftermath of the slayings Monday of the husband and mother of U.S. District Judge Joan Lefkow, deputy U.S. marshals are providing protection to the judge who is scheduled to sentence white supremacist Matthew Hale in April, according to law-enforcement sources.

Judge James T. Moody, 66, was brought in from Hammond to preside over Hale's trial after he was convicted last year of soliciting Lefkow's murder. Moody's protection will begin as soon as he returns from out of town, sources said.

Moody, a federal judge for 23 years, was targeted last May in a threatening letter from a woman upset over the 33-month sentence he imposed for an arson conviction. She pleaded guilty in December.

Lawyers say Moody is a no-nonsense jurist, a stickler for preparation by lawyers but fair and patient even during lengthy, complex trials.

"He will let you try your case," said Kevin Milner, a former federal prosecutor now in private practice in Dyer, Ind.

The Almanac of the Federal Judiciary, which evaluates judges based on lawyer surveys, praised Moody's legal acumen but said attorneys found his temperament unpredictable.

"He lives up to his name," one Indiana lawyer who requested anonymity said Wednesday.

But Thomas Anthony Durkin, a Chicago lawyer who defended Hale at his murder-solicitation trial, said Moody is as good a trial judge as he has seen.

"He makes up his mind quickly," Durkin said. "He's not afraid to change his mind."

Jon DeGuilio, a former U.S. attorney in Hammond, said Moody efficiently keeps trials moving.

"I think there's always a concern about security for any federal judge," DeGuilio said. "But he's been on the bench for so long ... I don't think it's going to have any impact on his decision-making."

Memo: PRESIDING JUDGE

Edition: Chicago Final

Section: News

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Index Terms: PROBE ; CHICAGO ; FEDERAL ; OFFICIAL ; FAMILY ; MURDER ; REACTION ; SAFETY ; ISSUE

Record Number: CTR0503030270

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