

**RALPH N. KLEPS AWARDS  
2010 – 2011**

**SUPERIOR COURT OF CONTRA COSTA COUNTY  
Elder Court**

**SPEAKER:** Hon. Joyce Cram, Judge – Contra Costa County  
Elder Court, in Contra Costa County, brings together all of the types of cases that relate to the seniors: criminal cases, civil cases, conservatorships, restraining orders, evidentiary hearings and trials that relate to a senior. And we bring them all together so that we can resolve all of their cases in as few court appearances as possible. As we started to plan our Elder Court, we had conferences with all of the partner agencies relating to aging.

**SPEAKER:** Hon. Mary Ann O'Malley, Judge – Contra Costa County  
We got together with the public defender and the district attorney's office representative and we asked them about their case loads and if they would be interested in joining up with a program like this. And surprisingly, everybody was on board. And so we started developing what we thought would be an effective elder court.

**SPEAKER:** Hon. Joyce Cram, Judge – Contra Costa County  
We determined that we needed to expand from just criminal and restraining order cases.

**SPEAKER:** Hon. Mary Ann O'Malley, Judge – Contra Costa County  
We wanted it to really handle more civil cases, probate cases, conservatorships. They could handle all their matters all in one place with one judge at one time, rather than numerous appearances through many, many different courts over many, many different months.

**SPEAKER:** Hon. Joyce Cram, Judge – Contra Costa County  
It was with that input from the community that made us really realize that there was a need to get these issues resolved in basically one-stop shopping.

**SPEAKER:** Hon. Diana Becton, Presiding Judge – Contra Costa County  
We identified three specific focuses when we started thinking about developing an elder court. One was the need to educate our community on the issues that are facing our elder community. The other was to provide resources and support so that when our elders come into court they have the proper legal help as well as the emotional support to get them through the court process. And, finally to provide the resources for this court to operate efficiently.

SPEAKER: Verna Haas, Attorney – Senior Self-Help Center

What we do here at the Senior Legal Self-Help clinic is we act as an adjunct or support service for the seniors who come. So often what happens is seniors who have hearings for elder abuse, or who are seeking a TRO, will come into the clinic, and they will need some kind of support service. For example, they will need help in preparing their petitions, or they will have questions about the process, or they will have questions about what to do after they get their temporary restraining order. So, we try to provide support for the seniors in a safe place, a quiet place, a supportive place.

SPEAKER: Tina Olton, Senior Peer Counseling Program

It is really quite interesting to me when we do meet someone who has had another court experience, and they talk to us after their hearing in Elder Court, and tell us what a difference it has made that the judge makes them feel comfortable with what's going on, that we, as senior peer counselors there, are helping them with the experience, and particularly the aftermath of whatever it is that's happened in the court.

SPEAKER: Hon. Joyce Cram, Judge – Contra Costa County

The public responds really, really enthusiastically. It's a very popular type of program. But then from the litigants, I also know that it is effective because they know that they've been heard. They know they've been heard by someone who cares. And, they get to participate in fashioning the resolution. That maybe in the criminal context, maybe in the restraining order context, whatever it is, I try to get their input into what it is that they want as the outcome.

SPEAKER: Dian a Becton, Presiding Judge – Contra Costa County

We have a specific need in our community, and we are filling that need by bringing to bear all of the resources that we can possibly bring to the table to assist our elder community.