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State justice, former Yonkers mayor seek County Court spots

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WHITE PLAINS - Republicans will try to hold on to a pair of Westchester County Court judgeships next week, but will have to defeat a state judge and a former Yonkers mayor to do so.

State Supreme Court Justice Francis Nicolai opted not to seek re-election this year and is teaming with former Yonkers Mayor Gerald Loehr on the Democratic ticket. The GOP candidates are Irene Ratner of New Rochelle and Yorktown Justice William Gerstenzang. The Right to Life candidates are Mary Clark of New Rochelle and Terrence Dwyer of Valhalla.

The winners will succeed two Republican county judges, Kenneth Lange, who is reaching the mandatory retirement age of 70, and Fred Shapiro, who chose not to run again.

County judges serve 10-year terms with a yearly salary of \$136,700.

Ratner, a court attorney-referee in Family Court, was tapped to fill a vacant county judgeship in 2002 but lost the election for the seat later that year. She also is on the Independence and Conservative lines. Gerstenzang has been a town justice since 1997.

Both Democrats are also running on the Working Families line, and Nicolai was nominated by the Conservative Party and Loehr by the Independence Party. Nicolai, a Pleasantville resident, served as a county judge in the 1980s and was elected to state Supreme Court in 1990. He has been the administrative judge of the 9th Judicial District since 1998. Loehr served as Yonkers mayor in the early 1980s and now lives in Ardsley.

The Westchester Bar Association rated Nicolai "well qualified" and Ratner, Gerstenzang and Loehr as "qualified." The Westchester Women's Bar Association found Nicolai to be "outstanding" and the three others to be "well qualified." Clark and Dwyer were not rated by either group's screening committee.

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