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## Garber steps down after 27 years serving on bench

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Sheldon C. Garber needed a change in 1985.

"The way I practiced law as a sole practitioner — one moment I'm in Markham. And the next moment, I'm in DuPage County," Garber said.

"I tried to maintain two offices — a suburban office in Northlake and a downtown office here. And it was just getting to the point where I was about to be burned out. And then I found this wonderful job."

Garber became a Cook County Circuit Court associate judge 27 years ago and spent most of his judicial career handling eviction cases in the Daley Center. Today, he retired.

His bench colleagues aren't the only ones who will miss him.

"Judge Garber ... had an uncanny way of settling cases that even the parties and their attorneys thought could not be settled," said Richard W. Christoff of Sanford, Kahn Ltd.

"I can't tell you how many times my clients had said, 'I hadn't even thought of that.' And he would figure out a way to resolve the case where both parties would agree. That, unfortunately, is something that the practitioners in this area are going to miss."

Garber turned 74 years old

this month and often relies on a motorized chair to travel.

"The spirit is willing. The brain is still OK. The body is not cooperating. I want to be at my best when I'm judging. And at this stage, I have a hard time getting on the bench," Garber said.

Raised on the city's West Side, Garber earned a law degree from The John Marshall Law School in 1964.

He represented plaintiffs in personal-injury cases at Karlin, Karlin & Fleisher from 1964 to 1970. He worked as a solo practitioner from 1970 to 1985, continuing with personal-injury matters and representing buyers and sellers in real estate transactions.

His first five years on the bench brought him to traffic and paternity courts. He joined the 1st Municipal District's Forcible Entry and Detainer Section in 1990.

In 2003, he became the section's supervisor and handled all the cases that request juries when landlords want to evict residential and commercial tenants.

"It's a real balancing act," Garber said.

"There isn't a great deal of discretion that the courts have. The statutes tell you what's required. If the landlord has met the statutory requirement — by that I mean he served the notice



Sheldon C. Garber

timely, filed his suit timely — I have very little discretion to say 'These are nice people; we're not going to put 'em out.'

"On the other hand, it is within the discretion of the court to set how long they can stay before the sheriff will move them out."

It's no shock that a poor economy can fuel evictions as rent payments get missed when people lose jobs and companies hit slumps. But neighborhood improvements also drive evictions.

"West Town and the South Loop — those used to be places where people could rent inexpensive properties," Garber said. "Once they become gentrified, once the rehabbers get in and

start redoing those areas, they invest a lot of money and they expect a return."

"So what happens is people who used to pay \$375 find it hard to raise \$900. That's caused an increase in our loss of inexpensive (housing) stock."

When he worked as a lawyer, Associate Judge Leonard Murray used to appear in front of Garber. Murray said Garber maintained a respectful demeanor in court.

Heading into a case handled by Garber, Murray knew the judge "was going to be ready on hearing dates for both motions and trials and that he knew his stuff and that you're going to be treated fairly," Murray said.

Reflecting on his time on the bench, Garber said he worked with a motto of taking his responsibilities — but not himself — seriously.

"I've never felt at all superior because I put on the robe and go out there. Those standing in front of me are as bright as I am," Garber said.

"You'd like to believe you became an associate (judge) because you were the brightest and best available. Most judges became judges because they got some help from someone in the political system.

"And I never deluded myself into thinking anything else. But that's a story for another day."