

**northwest**

# Justice for All

**Minority rights champion runs for judge**

by Malka Geffen

**F**ormer Multnomah County Circuit Court judge David Gernant, the first openly gay male judge in Oregon, retired this month, leaving the fourth district position open and highly contested. At the age of 32, Trung Tu is the youngest of the five candidates vying for the position. He is also the only gay candidate in the race.

When the circuit court judge seat opened, Tu was encouraged by his mentors and colleagues to run. "I have wanted to be a judge for as long as I can remember," he says, "and it's rare to be able to run for this position."

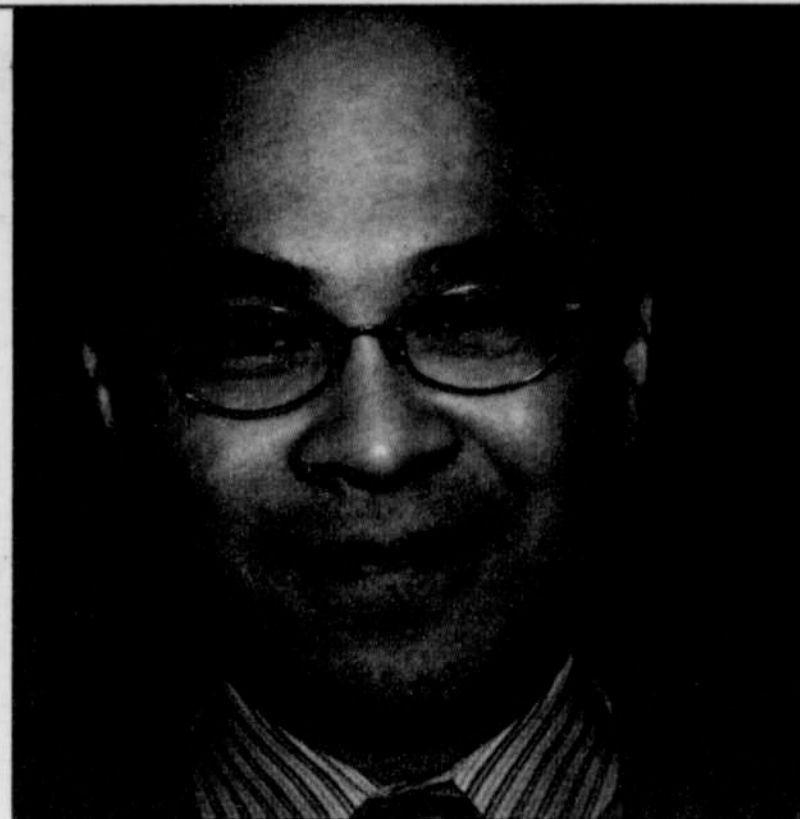
Circuit court judges usually retire midterm, at which point the governor appoints a successor. The incumbent judge tends to run unopposed in subsequent elections. Tu says he is not entrenched in the "legal culture," which has an unspoken rule that only more seasoned attorneys qualify as appointees. He hopes Multnomah County citizens will realize they have a rare opportunity to elect someone with a fresh perspective to a judiciary that, as he says, "is seriously lacking in diversity."

Tu is young and hip and does more by the lamplight of the midnight hour than most of us do all day. When he's not handling a variety of civil cases at McEwen Gisvold, he is serving on the Oregon State Bar's committee on affirmative action and single-handedly raising his 11-year-old

brother, Phu. He also devotes his time and energy to the financially disadvantaged, who have been historically blocked from equal access to the judicial system because of their socioeconomic status. Tu speaks of the two ways he keeps this balancing act going: "Lots of energy and a well-tuned calendar."

Tu also realizes he owes much of his tenacity to the struggles he encountered as both a racial and sexual minority. He was born in Phan Thiet, South Vietnam, in 1973 and moved to Portland as a young child and refugee of the Vietnam War. He did not speak English when he arrived and said he was often taunted, teased and beat up because of his immigrant status. He remembers when his family was on welfare and had no understanding of their new legal system. Despite the inequities he and his family faced, Tu worked hard and, in 1995, graduated from University of Notre Dame. He returned to Portland to receive his juris doctor from Lewis & Clark College in 2000.

"It is important to be out and be respected," Tu says about coming out in his college years. He remembers the zeal with which, as a law student, he fought against the Solomon Amendment, which denies institutions of higher education federal



Portland litigation and appellate attorney Trung Tu is running for Multnomah County Circuit Court judge.

funding for prohibiting military recruitment on their campuses. He says the military's "don't ask, don't tell" rule makes it impossible for member institutions of the Association of American Law Schools to comply with policies of prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and demanding the same of any employer to which the institution grants access for employment. As an attorney, Tu continues supporting underdog causes by mentoring minority law students and providing pro bono work for Q Center.

"My goal is to give back to the community," he says. "As a circuit court judge, I'll be in a better position to ensure that all litigants have equal access in the legal system regardless of who they are and that they'll be treated with respect, dignity and compassion."

Tu won Equity Foundation's Bill & Ann Shepherd Legal Scholarship Fund for his commitment to equal rights and justice for queers. His various awards and fellowships are too numerous to mention, but all of his accolades are testaments to his professionalism and leadership and to the respect of his fellow students, professors and colleagues.

Tu handles a variety of commercial, business, corporate, legal malpractice defense, real estate and employment cases, and he represents a diverse set of clients, which he says gives him the experience he needs for the bench. Before joining McEwen Gisvold in 2003, he had a broad and varied legal career. After he clerked at the Oregon Department of Justice, he worked at the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office and for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in San Francisco.

Tu distinguishes himself from his many opponents by having "a broader background in civil law." He says challengers Lane Borg, Julia Philbrook, Cheryl Albrecht and Kathleen Payne mainly practice criminal and family law. Another difference, which might be most significant to the queer community, is that Tu is the only candidate to be endorsed by Oregon Supreme Court Justice Rives Kistler, the only openly gay supreme court justice in the United States. **10**

Meet TRUNG TU and Oregon Supreme Court candidate Virginia Linder over coffee and snacks 12:30 p.m. April 23 at Bridgeport United Church of Christ, 621 N.E. 76th Ave. RSVP to Susie Shepherd at 503-286-1752.

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