



Life SECTION D

Tuesday, July 10, 2007

# Here come the judges — to the TV screen are on the way

By Gary Strauss  
USA TODAY

The verdict is in: Judges are hot. At least on daytime TV. Ten nationally syndicated court shows will be on viewer docket this fall, including newcomer *Judge David Young* (Sept. 10, check listings).

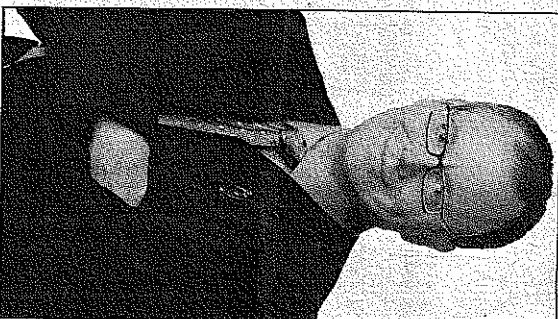
Several more are in development, including a potential 2008 CBS series featuring Florida's outspoken "crying judge" Larry Seidlin, whose courtroom antics and personality enthralled viewers — and syndicators — while presiding over the dispute over Anna Nicole Smith's body.

Court television's roots trace

back to the late 1950s with *Divorce Court*, but the genre began gaining steam when CBS distribution unit launched *Judge Judy* in 1996. Now heading into its 12th season, *Judy* remains the top-rated judicial show, with an audience competitive with *Oprah* at about 6 million viewers. Pint-size former Manhattan family-court judge Judy Sheindlin is one of TV's highest paid stars, earning \$25 million a year, according to *Forbes*.

*Judy* and other court shows resonate with viewers because they combine the best of talk soaps, reality, drama and — with their clear winners and losers — even game shows, says John Nogawski, head of syndication for CBS, which also produces *Judge Joe Brown*.

Court television also contains classic elements of "good vs. evil, characters: viewers can



Sony Pictures Television

joins the CBS docket: Judge David Young.

root for," says Melanie Chitek, head of syndicated and reality programming for Sony TV (*Judge Hatchett*, *Maria Lopez*). Sony is hoping for another star in Young, the Miami jurist who gained fame in 2005 for jailing two America West pilots who tried to fly while inebriated. "He's smart, has a great personality and he's interesting to watch," Chitek says.

Judge-themed programming is gaining momentum as talk shows falter: About 30 have been canceled since 2000 vs. 6 judge shows. Among the current pack, several judge-led shows attract bigger audiences than many talk shows, notes Bob Cook, president of Twentieth Television, which distributes *Divorce Court*, a classic revived in 1998; *Judge Alex*, launched in 2005; and *Cristina's*

*Court*, created in 2006. As a bonus, court shows are relatively inexpensive to produce. They cost as little as 50% of a talk show.

Studio execs say they are continually pitched the next hot judge, as well as odd concepts such as comedy court, street court and courts involving pets and roommates. In the end, though, it boils down to the judge. "We're looking for the next *Judge Judy*," Nogawski says, "a person who has that special charisma and personality."

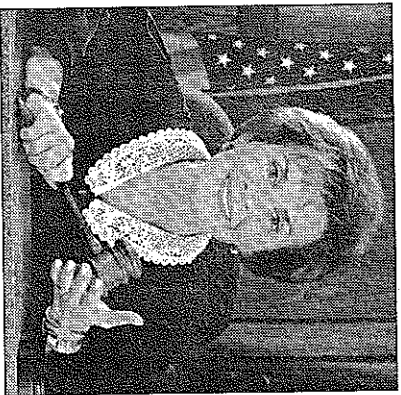
Still, daytime TV can support only a finite number of shows, no matter what the genre. "We're getting near a saturation point," says programming executive Hilary Estey McDoughlin of *Tel-*

*epictures*, which produces *The People's Court* and *Judge Mathis*.

## Television

They may be retired from the bench, but they're in lively full-court mode on TV, where they dispense justice in cases ranging from warring spouses to squabbling small-claims disputes. The judges are as entertaining as many of the litigants in their courtrooms. USA TODAY's **Gary Strauss** looks at the nine judges now in syndication and a 10th joining the pack this fall:

# Who's got style? You be the judge



By Bob Kna Jr., USA TODAY

### Judge Judy

**Back story:** The feisty former family-court judge's show is among daytime TV's top performers, and Judy Sheindlin is credited with reviving the genre. Small-claims cases range from botched breast jobs to eBay scams, along with occasional celeb litigants such as ex-Hollywood hooker Divine Brown and Sex Pistol Johnny Rotten.  
**Style:** Confrontational, abrasive and intimidating — a style parodied on shows from *SNL* to *The Simpsons*.  
**Website:** [www.judgejudy.com](http://www.judgejudy.com)



Warner Bros.

### The People's Court

**Back story:** In various incarnations, *The People's Court* has been ruled by former New York mayor Ed Koch, Judge Joseph Wapner and Judge Judy's husband, ex-New York state Supreme Court justice Jerry Sheindlin. *Court* is now ruled by Marilyn Milian, TV's first Hispanic judge, who is a former assistant state Florida attorney and Miami circuit court criminal judge.  
**Style:** Smart and sassy.  
**Website:** [www.peoplescourt.com](http://www.peoplescourt.com)



Warner Bros.

### Judge Mathis

**Back story:** Greg Mathis is a former Detroit gang member and high school dropout who turned his life around at 18, eventually becoming the youngest judge in Michigan state history. His story has been chronicled in the stage musical *Been There Done That*.  
**Style:** Streetwise. "It's time for hard decisions and tough love," Mathis says before each show. "Justice that makes a difference. That's what I'm about."  
**Website:** [www.asjjudgemathis.com](http://www.asjjudgemathis.com)



Sony Television

### Judge Maria Lopez

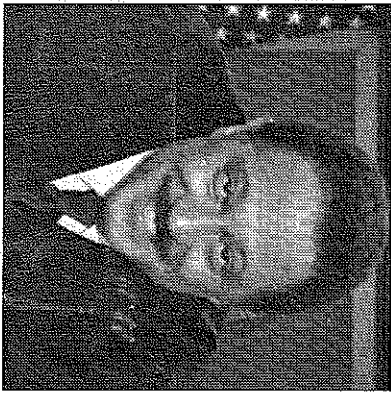
**Back story:** The Cuba-born Lopez served as assistant attorney general in Massachusetts and as a state counsel for refugees and immigrants before being appointed the state's first Latina judge in Superior Court. She resigned in 2003, her 14-year tenure often marked in controversy for her outspokenness and sentences.  
**Style:** Caustic and quick-tempered.  
**Website:** [www.judgemarialopez.com](http://www.judgemarialopez.com)



Columbia/TV

### Judge Hatchett

**Back story:** Former corporate attorney and Georgia state juvenile court judge Glenda Hatchett is brass opinionated and quick-tempered — which often makes for compelling viewing on her 8-year-old show.  
**Style:** In your face.  
**Website:** [www.judgehatchett.com](http://www.judgehatchett.com)

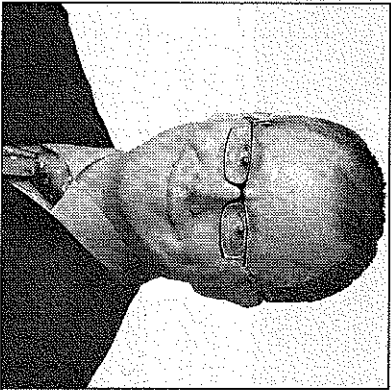


### Judge Joe Brown

**Back story:** Brown, whose focus is on small-claims disputes, worked as a prosecutor and public defender before serving as a criminal court judge in Memphis. He developed a reputation for creative alternative sentencing, and gained notice after he was assigned to reopen the case of the late James Earl Ray, assassin of Martin Luther King Jr. The show is in its 10th season.

**Style:** Blunt.

**Website:** [www.judgejoebrown.com](http://www.judgejoebrown.com)



### Judge David Young

Sony Pictures Television

**Back story:** The newest entry (coming in September), the former F. Lee Bailey law clerk captured attention as a Florida judge in 2005 for sentencing two inebriated airline pilots to prison. He also gave an 87-year-old woman a 31-year term — the time she spent on the lam before a murder arrest.

**Style:** "Strong and compassionate. He'll be fun and interesting to watch," says Sony TV's Melanie Chitek.

**Website:** [www.judgedavidyoung.com](http://www.judgedavidyoung.com)



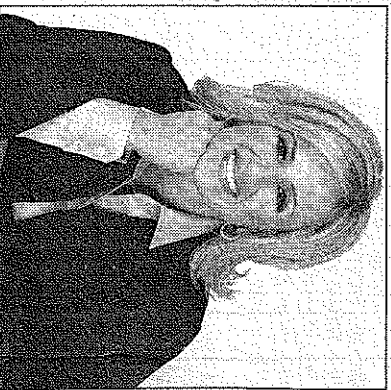
### Divorce Court

20th Television

**Back story:** The second oldest of the current batch of shows, *Divorce Court* and its bickering couples first aired in the late 1950s and was resurrected in the mid-1980s. It's now in its third incarnation. Lynn Toler, a former Ohio municipal-court judge who previously hosted Fox's *Power of Attorney*, has presided since 2005.

**Style:** "I like to use humor because I think it loosens people up," Toler says.

**Website:** [www.divorcecourt.com](http://www.divorcecourt.com)



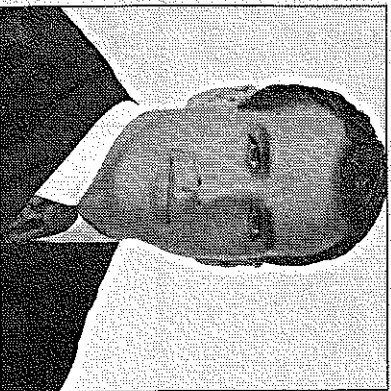
### Cristina's Court

20th Television

**Back story:** Judge Cristina Pérez hosted Telemundo's *La Corte de Familia* (*Family Court*) before launching *Cristina's Court* in 2006. She became the first television judge to cross over from a Spanish-language format. Her first book, *Living by Los Dichos: Advice From a Mother to a Daughter*, is due in September.

**Style:** Tough and no-nonsense.

**Website:** [www.cristinascourt.com](http://www.cristinascourt.com)



### Judge Alex

20th Television

**Back story:** The only TV judge with police, legal and judicial experience, Havana-born former Miami-Dade circuit-court judge Alex Ferrer hit the airwaves in 2005.

**Style:** Ferrer runs a tight ship, reining in litigants when things get out of hand. "I try to educate people on the law whenever possible so they know I'm not shooting from the hip. That's what differentiates me," he says.

**Website:** [www.judgealex.com](http://www.judgealex.com)