

In Memory of Retired El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Terrence M. Finney

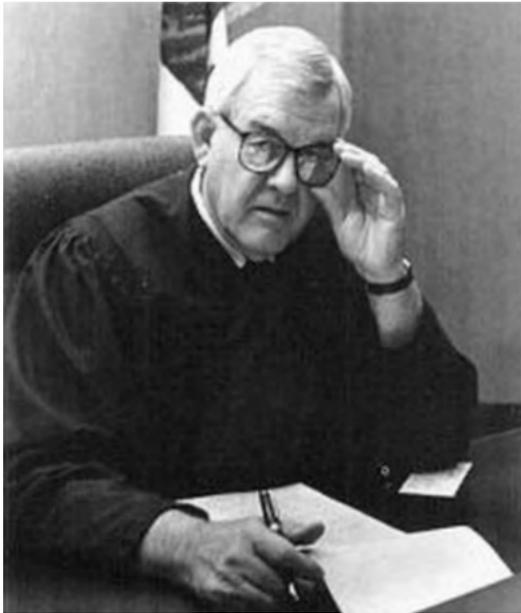


Photo courtesy of Mountain News

South Lake Tahoe's first superior court judge, Honorable Terrence M. Finney, passed away on November 7, 2018 at the age of 84.

After graduating from Willamette College of Law in 1962, he and his bride Lenore moved to her native El Dorado County in 1963 where her parents still lived. Judge Finney was hired as an investigator at the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, then worked as a deputy district attorney from 1964 to 1970, when he was elected District Attorney of El Dorado County. While in the district attorney's office he successfully prosecuted a no-body-ever-located case (a mother and a child in Coloma), and several other murder cases, including death penalty cases, which serve as legal precedent under California law.

In 1977, Governor Jerry Brown, during his first term in office, appointed Judge Finney to the new South Lake Tahoe branch of the Superior Court in El Dorado County. He served for 20 years before retiring from his full time position on the bench in 1997, continuing to sit on assignment as a visiting judge and also as a private mediator and arbitrator for many years.

Judge Finney was so well regarded that the Judicial Council sought him out for some complex criminal case assignments throughout the years. However, the biggest case of his career, and, one of his favorites, was the renowned Mono Lake case, to which he was assigned by the chief justice of the California Supreme Court. In the 1980s, several environmental and outdoor groups including the Audubon Society, and the California Department of Fish and Game, filed suit against the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, who had diverted four of the five streams feeding Mono Lake to send it to their customers. This diversion by the LADWP was detrimental to the lake, its ecosystem, and resulted in the destruction of fish, bird, and other wildlife habitat.

The case went on for several years, and in a landmark decision, Finney ruled against the LADWP and mandated the diversions stop and the lake be returned to a healthy state. He spent a decade overseeing the process, ensuring the compliance and the ecological restoration. The losing party appealed, but Judge Finney's ruling stood. Mono Lake's status as a natural treasure has been preserved due to his courageous decision.

Judge Finney was so respected and well liked, that many of the attorneys who practiced before him remained in contact with him throughout the years, attending his retirement, and visiting with him this year when they learned he was so ill. He was so revered that on August 22, 2018 the Judicial Council of California recognized his many years of dedicated service to the citizens of El Dorado County and throughout Northern California where he sat on assignment in retirement.

There will be a public memorial service at the South Lake Tahoe courthouse in the near future.