

Ex-Secret Service agent named LP justice

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May Chow, the new Lake Placid village justice, smiles on Main Street in Lake Placid on Tuesday. (Enterprise photo — Lauren Yates)

LAKE PLACID — Lake Placid has a new village justice.

Village resident May Chow was appointed as village justice on Monday during the Lake Placid Village Board of Trustees' organizational board meeting. Chow will finish the remaining term of former Justice David Coursen, who resigned earlier this year amid an investigation into a complaint that he'd allegedly shown bias in court.

Chow, 53, is a retired United States Secret Service field agent. She has a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and a master's degree in sociology from the University of Memphis. Originally from Clarksdale, Mississippi, Chow moved to Lake Placid in 2020 with her husband Andrew Orringer — who attended Northwood School and has family in Lake Placid — along with their daughter, Lucy.

Though Chow’s new position as justice was effective upon being sworn in Monday, Chow still has to complete a “Taking the Bench” certification course in Albany before handling court cases. Her first day at the bench is tentatively set for May 4.

Chow will serve as the village justice until April 2024. The village is expected to elect a new justice in its March 2024 election, though the future of Lake Placid’s court remains uncertain as local officials and committees have begun revisiting the idea of dissolving the village’s court system.

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About Chow

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Chow joined the Secret Service in 1998 after earning her master’s degree. She was assigned to protective and investigative missions, providing security detail for former Vice President Dick Cheney and investigating cases of counterfeit cash, bank and cyber fraud over the years. But after enduring injuries in a serious car crash in a motorcade during Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign in 2015 — and after more than 20 years of service — Chow chose to retire in December 2019.

Chow is also a certified emergency medical technician and forensic examiner.

Since moving to Lake Placid, Chow has devoted much of her time to volunteering in the community — she’s a member of the Rotary Club and she’s volunteered for the FISU Winter World University Games, the Lake Placid Film Festival, the Empire State Winter Games, the FIS Ski Jumping World Cup and with afterschool programs at Scott’s Cobble Nordic Center. She’s a substitute teacher in the local school district. She also has a catering company, “Lake Placid Bread Company,” which caters the occasional pizza party and other events — that’s mostly for fun, she said.

Chow believes her investigative experience with the Secret Service and knowledge of federal law will help her in learning about the position of village justice. She even did some research into past village justices to learn more about their backgrounds, and she found that many of them also had previous experience in law enforcement. She believes the desire to help the community through justice work also exists among law enforcement workers.

“We do it because we want to help,” she said.

When asked how she plans to avoid potential biases in court, Chow said it’s her goal to remain objective and fair when handling court cases. She’s more interested in serving appropriate justice than in favoring any person who comes to court — even if that person were a member of her family.

Chow is one of the few women in village history — if not the only woman — to hold the position of village justice.

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Court consolidation talks

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The village board briefly discussed the possibility of consolidating its court with the North Elba Town Court after Coursen resigned, an idea that's been rejected by Lake Placid voters twice in the past.

The first time the village put the question to voters of whether to dissolve their court and transfer cases to the town of North Elba court was in the summer of 2016. Bill Hulshoff, the village justice at the time and an opponent of the court's dissolution, circulated a petition calling for a referendum on the question after the village board voted unanimously to abolish its remaining justice position earlier that year — the last step in a dissolution process of the village court system that began in 2015. Voters shot down the dissolution, 104 to 72. The second time it was put on the ballot, with Hulshoff again a vocal opponent of dissolution, the proposal to dissolve the village's court was defeated by a vote of 132 to 114.

While village Mayor Art Devlin said he was in favor of consolidating the courts this past February, he said he wouldn't want that decision to come from the board again.

The Lake Placid-North Elba Community Development Commission, an advisory board to the village and town boards, is now expressing interest in assessing court consolidation this year.

Lake Placid isn't the only village to have considered court dissolution. The village of Saranac Lake court took its last case on March 17, 2014, after its board of trustees voted in 2010 to kick-start the dissolution process. When that dissolution was finalized, cases were directed to the courts of the three towns in the village: Harriestown, North Elba and St. Armand.

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