

METRO

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SECTION

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WEDNESDAY

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HIGHLIGHTS

FOCUS

RECALL STANCE: The Orange County Democratic Party voiced support for the recall of South County Community College District Trustee Steven Frogue. **B2**

POLICE CRASH: Three people were injured Tuesday when a Los Alamitos police car transporting a prisoner to Orange County Jail collided with a Mazda Miata. **B2**

FEE PROPOSAL: Citing the benefits for middle-class families, Gov. Pete Wilson touted his proposal to cut state vehicle license fees at an appearance in



DON BARTLETTI / Los Angeles Times
Outside court, Deputy Dist. Atty. Lewis Rosenblum discusses a case.

Prosecutor 57, Murderers 0

■ **Courts:** State group honors deputy district attorney who has a perfect trial record for slaying convictions.

By HOPE HAMASHIGE
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

When it comes to trying murder cases in Orange County, the last person defendants want to see is Deputy Dist. Atty. Lewis Rosenblum.

Rosenblum, who has earned a reputation as an exacting lawyer, a tenacious prosecutor and a convincing orator, holds a perfect record of 57 murder convictions. Of the eight times he has sought the death penalty, juries

have agreed with him on every case.

No other prosecutor in the state has sent that many convicted murderers to death row.

"I have never seen a trial record that good," Orange County Assistant Dist. Atty. John Conley said.

That record has led to Rosenblum's selection as 1998 Prosecutor of the Year by the California District Attorneys Assn., out of more than 3,000 prosecuting attorneys in the state.

Rosenblum, 46, who began his

career as a clerk, has a rare courtroom demeanor that sets him apart.

He's charming in front of a jury, eloquent but plain-spoken. Although his hair is graying, he still has a boyish look that makes him likable. His poise before a jury is matched only by the intensity with which he attacks the defense. He is always ready to destroy defense arguments, regardless of how well-prepared and researched they may be, according to defense attorneys.

Rosenblum attributes his success to a basic principle: "I don't like to lose. It would bother me forever if people didn't think I did my best."

Please see ROSENBLUM, B6

'I don't like to lose. It would bother me forever if people didn't think I did my best.'

LEWIS ROSENBLUM
Deputy district attorney

ROSENBLUM: Prosecutor Honored by State Group

Continued from B1
did my best."

Criminal law appeals to something that lies deep in Rosenblum's psyche—a sense of law and order and a desire to bring about some measure of justice for those people whose lives have been changed by violent crimes.

"It is very important to me that those people have someone who cares about what happened to them and was fighting for them," he said. "It's also very important to me that when people make a choice to commit a crime that they are properly punished."

Even when that punishment is death, Rosenblum doesn't flinch.

"I try to get the maximum sentence I can, which is sometimes death," he said. "I often think about the last moments of the victim's life and try to keep in mind that the guy at the end of the table is the person who chose to end their life."

Rosenblum joined the Orange County district attorney's office 17 years ago as a clerk while a student at Western State University Law School. He started, as all prosecu-

tors do, trying drunk driving, theft and assault cases. He later moved to prosecuting felony cases such as robberies, drug dealing and sexual assaults before landing a spot with the homicide division 10 years ago.

Rosenblum has been assigned to the homicide division longer than most prosecutors want to or are allowed to stay. In spite of the long hours, the pressure and the often horrific nature of his work, Rosenblum said he cannot imagine working at any other job.

"I really believe in this work and I know I am in the place I am supposed to be," he said. "It all comes together for me in this job."

Homicide cases, he said, are the most demanding because prosecutors are thrust into the spotlight and are under intense political pressure to convict. They can also be the hardest fought, Rosenblum said, because prosecutors often square off against the best criminal defense lawyers in the state.

In preparation for trials, Rosenblum's perfectionist tendencies kick into high gear. He can often be found in his cramped, but spotless,

office until midnight, piecing together cases and trying to anticipate defense strategies.

His attention to detail is legendary among defense attorneys, said Julian Bailey, who defended Edward Patrick Morgan Jr. against Rosenblum in 1996 in a high-profile death penalty case. Morgan, a convicted rapist, was found guilty in the slaying of Leanora Annette Wong on May 20, 1994, after spiriting her away from a nightclub in Orange.

"I love the guy, and I'm glad he's prosecuting people in this county, but that doesn't mean that I sleep well when I'm involved in a case with him," said Bailey, adding that he works much harder when he opposes Rosenblum.

Orange County Deputy Public Defender Denise Gragg faced Rosenblum in 1994 in one of the most shocking crimes in Orange County's history—the murder of honor student Stuart Tay by several other teenagers.

Gragg said she was shocked that Rosenblum was writing down everything she said in court, numbering her points and creating an

outline of her defense.

"It's incredible. He cannot be taken by surprise and he is never going to leave anything unturned," Gragg said.

Rosenblum is quick to establish rapport with jurors and is able to hold them through even lengthy, protracted court cases, defense attorneys say.

"He projects to a jury a mix of intensity and integrity that is very difficult to counterbalance. He is very true to his ideals and respects the truth and all those things get through to a jury," Gragg said.

It's not just the juries who seem to relate to Rosenblum.

During a recent case, Donna O'Brien, whose son, Kyle, was killed in 1997, thanked Rosenblum for successfully prosecuting her son's murderer. She said she was grateful that Rosenblum never let the jury forget who Kyle had been in life, a tactic she felt made them more sympathetic.

"He never once referred to Kyle as the victim or the deceased," O'Brien said. "I cannot thank him enough for all the work he did."