

(left to right) Judge Stephen Sillman, Veronica (Stephen's wife), and Judge Agliano. 1982

History Corner: Judge Sillman
A Story of Compassion & Second Chances

Written by Jorge Rubio

We launch our History Corner with the Honorable Judge Sillman, someone whose influence helped shape the early relationship between the courts and Sun Street Centers. Judge Sillman served on the Sun Street Centers Board of Directors from 1982 to 1989, while also sitting on the Municipal Court bench where he primarily handled alcohol-related offenses such as DUIs. At the time, he saw firsthand how often alcohol, drugs, and deeply human struggles were at the heart of the cases before him. When Superior Court **Judge Edmund James Leach**, former President of Sun Street Centers Board of Directors, approached him about joining the board, Judge Sillman didn't hesitate.

"He came up to me one day and said, 'we have an opening on the board and think you would be a great fit for the board.' Came in, got appointed and sat on the board."

What motivated Judge Sillman to serve wasn't just public duty, it was the change he witnessed in people's lives. Serving seven years on the board, he became deeply invested in the mission of Sun Street Centers and the growing partnership between treatment providers and the courts.

"It's part of what we are supposed to do as a judge, but it's also what we are supposed to do as a person. To make a difference in other people's lives."

During those early years, Sun Street Centers was still finding its footing, just a few buildings supported by the commitment of **Martin and Nancy Dodd**, along with advocates like **Andy Church** and **Sue Hughes** who fought fiercely to keep the program alive. Judge Sillman remembers being a young judge at just 34 years old, overwhelmed by the dedication of experienced fellow board members.

"They were very invested in Sun Street Centers to make sure it was successful."

At the time, watching the organization grow from the addition of the DUI program to sober living apartments, was what he remembers as a huge success.

"It was Martin and Nancy's dream to help people in this situation. This whole development of the Sun Street Centers community is pretty amazing!

"I think Martin and Nancy would be so proud to see what they started and where it has grown in its outreach and impact on the community."

One of the most powerful examples of Judge Sillman's belief in second chances is the story of **Eddie Hathcock**, a man who stood before him repeatedly during some of the darkest moments of his life. Eddie was caught in a cycle of drug use, homelessness, theft, and incarceration. He was involved in panhandling, dumpster diving, and stealing to survive withdrawal. Over time, Eddie appeared in Judge Sillman's courtroom again and again, until November 15, 1999, when everything changed. On that morning, sick from detox and overwhelmed by shame, Eddie was given a final choice: enter treatment or face years in prison. That decision led Eddie to write letters to programs and ultimately to Sun Street Centers. When he was released on April 24, 2000, **Frank Gutierrez** was there waiting for Eddie, and Eddie's recovery journey began. Reflecting on the impact of that moment.

"Eddie is really a big part, in my opinion, of how Sun Street Centers should be viewed, how the relationship between the court and Sun Street Centers should be viewed, and how a concerned judge can make a difference in someone's life if they are willing to make that change."

Eddie not only rebuilt his life through Sun Street Centers, but he became part of its mission, rising from resident to staff member to Director. Today, he carries deep gratitude for the people who believed in him when he struggled to believe in himself.

"I have nothing but love and respect for the Honorable Judge Sillman. I am not sure if he knows the depth or just how meaningful that was and what he has done for my life." -Eddie

Judge Sillman often shares a quote in Juvenile Hall and Drug Court, one he felt captured the heart of recovery:

"Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending." **-Maria Robinson**

Through his service on the bench and on the board, Judge Sillman lived that belief, reminding us that real justice includes compassion and courage to open the door to hope.



