

By Jennie Rodriguez Moore for [Recordnet.com](http://Recordnet.com)

STOCKTON - Those who knew him might remember the late John F. Cruikshank Jr., San Joaquin County's first black judge, as a funny, gregarious and outspoken leader.

San Joaquin Superior Court Judge George Abdallah recalls a more serious side.

When Abdallah passed the state bar exam in the late 1970s, the first person he and other law students visited was Cruikshank, a neighbor of Abdallah's family and a mentor. Both lived near the Miracle Mile.

"He was very happy for us, but at the same time, he kind of wanted to soberly talk to us about what it meant to practice law," Abdallah said. "He wanted to remind us of the responsibility ... the potential to do good and do harm."

Abdallah still remembers that advice.

Cruikshank's lessons of fair justice were evident in the juvenile courtroom, where his approach - decisions laced with discipline and opportunities for improvement - helped shape troubled youth.

"It was heartbreaking to lose him in our community," Abdallah said.

An institution known as one.Peterson academy at San Joaquin County Juvenile Hall is about to be renamed in honor of Cruikshank.

"He really believed in the students' opportunity to get a second chance and making sure they get the proper education while they're in the court system, so when they get out, they will be better citizens," said Jacqueline Ratto, spokeswoman for San Joaquin County Office of Education. "From what I understand, he went above and beyond. And the reason he was selected was really due to the fact he was such an asset to the program."

The school, accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, provides high school equivalency education diplomas to young people in correctional custody. In addition, it provides education in work force readiness, problem solving and appreciation of themselves and others.

Cruikshank, who moved from the Bay Area to be a trial lawyer in Stockton in 1974, was appointed judge in 1979.

He served in the juvenile court for years until his retirement in 1996. After retirement, he often spoke out about racism and economic injustice.

Some longtime courthouse staff and fellow judges also might remember his humorous and extroverted nature.

Cruikshank died Nov. 12, 2002. He was 75.

A dedication ceremony of the school to be named in his honor is scheduled at 5:30 p.m. Monday at the county Office of Education's Wentworth Education Center, 2707 Transworld Drive, Stockton.

"His legacy is not lost to us and it shouldn't be," Abdallah said. "It's a perfect way to honor him, especially at the site where he devoted so much of his time."

Contact reporter Jennie Rodriguez-Moore at (209) 943-8564 or [jrodriguez@recordnet.com](mailto:jrodriguez@recordnet.com). Visit

her blog at [recordnet.com/courtsblog](http://recordnet.com/courtsblog).