



Justice Howard Sturim at the bench with Barney.

He's a Constant Presence in the Courtroom But From Under The Bench

BY SUSAN DESANTIS

His name is Barney, and he's "presided" over some 20 jury trials in Mineola so far. He's escaped the jurors' notice, however, because he never comes out from under the bench.

Barney is an Irish Doodle who Justice Howard Sturim affectionately calls "my partner in crime." No matter how boring he may find the testimony, Barney never barks or complains. He sleeps peacefully under the bench or plays with the toy he brings into the courtroom.

Barney was trained for 10 months for his starring role as the judge's pet. As a diabetic alert dog, he knows to make a big fuss if the judge's blood sugar is becoming dangerously high or dangerously low. When it comes to diabetes, Barney is one of the few dogs who can claim that he's smarter than a judge.

"He does things that are just incredible," Sturim said. "He goes under the table, and I don't hear from him again and goes to the bathroom on command. When I play golf, he jumps in the cart, runs with unbelievable exuberance, and it's a pleasure to watch. More than one person has begged me to give him to them."

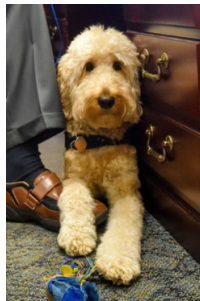
Diabetes is, of course, a very serious disease, especially for someone like Sturim who has had the disease for a very long time. The judge could become confused, sweat profusely, become very weak and pass out. In the long run, diabetes can lead to heart disease, stroke, kidney damage and nerve damage, if Sturim's blood sugar isn't regulated.

Barney is valuable in other ways, too. Sometimes, in a matrimonial or family court case, Sturim has to interview a child as young as 4 or 5 in camera. The child gets to play with Barney, and pretty soon the child is confiding in the judge. "I've gained a lot of

advantage having him with me," Sturim said.

When blood sugar dips or rises, it changes a person's blood chemistry and the smell of his breath. When Barney realizes the judge's blood sugar is off, he paws him to get his attention, and if the judge doesn't respond, he jumps on him. The judge gives Barney a treat every time he's right, and that's why Barney does it again and again.

When it comes to blood sugar, Barney is always right. Even when he's wrong, he's right, which brings up the story of Mineola attorney Ed Galison. Galison was with the judge and Barney in chambers one day. Barney began to alert the judge, but inexplicably Sturim's blood sugar was fine. Then he started to paw Galison.



Justice Howard Sturim's diabetes service dog, Barney (Photo by David Handschuh/ALM)

"And the judge says to me I didn't train him to do that," Galison said. "That dog is telling you something. I am a severe diabetic. And I went to my office, which is down the block and my sugar was quite low. The judge was correct in telling me the dog wasn't just giving me his paw as a trick but telling me that I had a problem, and I did."

The judge said Barney was very expensive. "But he's an investment in my health, and I thought it was worth it. He's my buddy," Sturim said. "He goes everywhere with me. I've left him at home only once. When I do a trial, he's under the bench. He's so well trained that when he's under the bench you don't even know he's there."

After every jury trial, the judge takes Barney in to thank the jurors. And all the jurors are surprised to learn that he was there under the bench all along. Even though Sturim and Barney are inseparable, and Sturim is supposed to be the judge, after all, it seems that Barney is the one getting all the respect.

"People come in here all the time to say hello to Barney," he said. "They know Barney but not me."