

Two lawyers appointed senior counsel

BY MAVIS TOH

HE MAY be one of the oldest lawyers to be appointed senior counsel, but 63-year-old Roderick Edward Martin says he will be in the job for a while yet.

"I don't intend to retire any time soon," he quipped to reporters at the opening of the legal year yesterday.

Mr Martin was one of two lawyers appointed senior counsel yesterday, joining 50 others who have been given the accolade of being the country's top lawyers.

He said he decided to enrol in law school because of his passion for arguing – first with his parents, then in school debates.

Mr Martin joined the Singapore Legal Service in 1972 and was a Registrar of the Supreme Court from 1978 until he left eight years later to go into private practice. His practice now mainly involves civil litigation including construction, commercial and conveyancing related claims.

He said he is humbled by the appointment but does not expect changes to his practice because of his new title. "For sure there won't be a halo over our heads," he joked.

The former marathon runner has a daughter who is studying chemical engineering in the United States and a son who, despite having two law degrees, is working in education in China.

Senior counsel – Singapore's equivalent of Britain's Queen's Counsel – are appointed each year by a selection committee.

The scheme was started in 1997 and appointment is based on the lawyer's grasp of the law, integrity of practice and their advocacy skills.

Joining Mr Martin in the ranks is Mr Chan Leng Sun, 46, head of admiralty and transport in Ang & Partners. He also has a commercial practice that covers trade, insurance and company law.

His decision to go into law surprised



Mr Roderick Edward Martin (left), 63, and Mr Chan Leng Sun, 46, are this year's chosen ones to be called to the top ranks of Singapore's lawyers. They join 50 other senior counsel in Singapore. The post is equivalent to Britain's Queen's Counsel, with Singapore's scheme starting in 1997.

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some as he was a man of few words who did not like arguing. His uncle once told him: "Whatever you do, don't do law".

"I didn't think I would be cut out for law or advocacy when I was young; I didn't like to talk, to argue. But I like the realm of ideas and philosophy that attracted me to law, it wasn't so much the debate or litigation side of it," he said.

The father of two, who is a keen saxophone player, spent about 100 hours in court last year and said the numbers will not come down even with his new title.

At the start of 2009, Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong called on senior counsel to spend more time arguing cases in court

than doing arbitration or corporate work.

He said then that senior counsel spent only one day a year in Court of Appeal hearings, unlike in other countries where they dominate such hearings.

Following his comments, senior counsel spent on average 14 days a year in court in 2009, up from 11 the year before.

Agreeing with CJ Chan's view, Mr Martin, who spent about three weeks in court last year, said: "A fighter pilot cannot be a fighter pilot unless he gets into the cockpit all the time. You have to be in the saddle because you mustn't lose your edge and cross examination is a skill you develop if you do more trials."