

STEPHEN LACHS

b. September 1939

WORLD'S FIRST OUT JUDGE

“Now, if a gay judge is appointed, people barely bat an eye ... at the time, this was big news.”

He made history in 1979 as the world's first openly gay judge.

Stephen Lachs is an American attorney and LGBTQ activist who became the world's first out judge, serving on the Los Angeles County Superior Court.

Lachs was born in New York and moved with his family to California when he was 16. He attended the University of California, Los Angeles, where he earned his bachelor's degree in 1960 and his law degree in 1963.

After graduation, Lachs worked for the California Department of Insurance. He subsequently worked for the Los Angeles public defender and in general-practice law.

Although Lachs's closest friends knew he was gay, his family and colleagues were unaware. He did not broadly disclose his sexual orientation until his early 30s, when

he was invited to a meeting of law students at the L.A. Gay Community Services Center (now the L.A. LGBT Center). In the early 1970s, coming out could have cost Lachs his career and his apartment, but the experience that night inspired him. The group had never met a gay lawyer. Lachs got involved with the center, and before long, he was serving on its board.

In 1975 Lachs was elected as a commissioner to the Los Angeles County Superior Court.

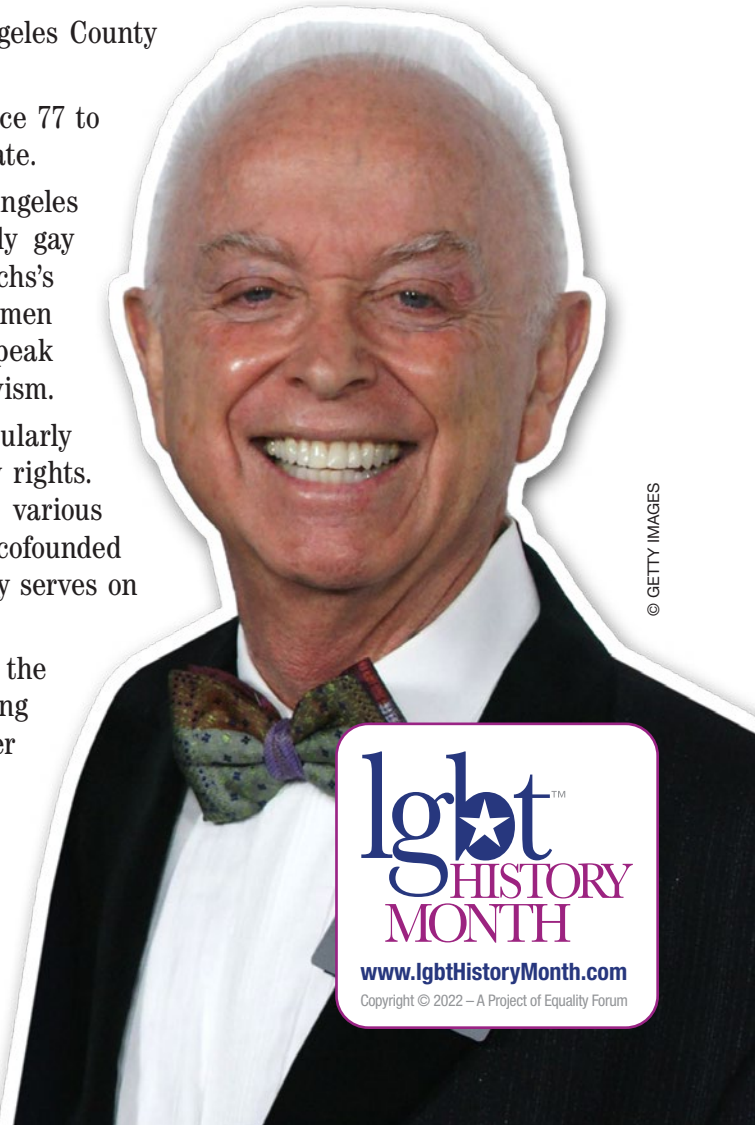
A year later, he and 11 other professional men formed Influence 77 to fight the potential election of a homophobic city council candidate.

In 1979 Governor Jerry Brown appointed Lachs to the Los Angeles County Superior Court, making him the world's first openly gay judge. The publicity surrounding the appointment became Lachs's international outing. He received letters of praise from gay men around the globe. Invitations to appear in the media and to speak at events poured in, and the experience helped cement his activism.

Lachs had always been active in Jewish organizations, particularly in fundraising, and he used those skills in the service of gay rights. He chaired the AIDS Project Los Angeles and worked with various organizations to help stem the epidemic. In the early '90s, he cofounded the International Association of LGBTQ+ Judges. He currently serves on the board of the Desert AIDS Project.

Lachs remained a superior court judge until he retired from the bench in 1999. Thereafter, he practiced law privately, handling all kinds of cases, including two matters involving the singer Michael Jackson.

Lachs lives in California with his husband, Michael Ruvo, whom he met during a speaking engagement. They have been together for 41 years.



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