

## She's judged the best

*Glendale resident Judge Cristina Perez is honored as she wins her first Emmy for TV court show.*

By Joyce Rudolph

Forget Judge Judy. Glendale has its own fearsome judge on the bench, and she's at the top of her game.

Glendale resident and TV judge Cristina Perez received the Emmy for Outstanding Legal/Courtroom Program for her show, "Cristina's Court," during the National Television Academy's 35th Annual Daytime Entertainment Emmy Awards last week at the Kodak Theatre in Hollywood.



Judge Cristina Perez of "Cristina's Court" sits with her Emmy at her Glendale home Thursday. (Alex Collins/The Leader)

"I'm a judge," Perez said. "Every case is real. They are Small Claims Court cases, and we issue real, binding decisions."

The former host of Telemundo's "Family Court" said getting the honor is an exhilarating feeling.

"It's amazing, truly amazing," Perez said. "It's one of the most incredible experiences ever. Who would have thought? Just aside from being married and having a child, it's really an exhilarating feeling. For me, it's evidence of the hard work our incredible producers have been doing."

The show was up against "The People's Court," "Judge Judy," "Judge Hatchett" and "Judge David Young," she said.

The winning episode was called "Requiem for a Pit Bull," and it was a small claims court case with a legal issue of loss of property, she said.

"The paramount issues were animal rights activists vs. gun control activists and animal cruelty vs. defense of property and self," Perez said.

A man had shot and killed a pit bull because he claimed the dog was attacking him, but he had no evidence that the dog was violent, Perez said.

“He shot the dog five times with a .22-caliber gun, knowing that gun doesn’t kill the first time,” she said. “He was able to walk into the house twice. He should have gone in and stayed and called authorities.”

The man instead took the dog’s body and threw it in a dumpster, Perez said.

“Any dog has the potential to be dangerous, but in this case, it didn’t make sense,” she said.

Winning the Emmy was a big surprise to the show’s executive producer, Peter Brennan.

“I’m in shock,” he said. “I started the ‘Judge Judy’ show in 1996 and for six years we went to the Emmys.”

But they always came home empty-handed, he said. Then, this year, a new category was created. In the past, they were in the Special Show category and lost to the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, he said.

While the purpose of courtroom shows is to entertain, Perez believes what makes her show stand out is the content. She attributes that feature to Brennan, who also started “Judge Joe Brown” and the news show “A Current Affair.”

“We are about people,” Perez said.

“We’re about stories. We are not looking to be better than so-and-so’s show because we recognize that every case is different. Their story becomes our story and we realize that everyone’s story deserves the same attention.”

The segment taught a good lesson to everybody who thinks that pit bulls and pit bull owners are always the guilty party, Brennan said.

“It was clear the pit bull was an innocent puppy, and the man who shot him was trigger happy,” he said.

“I thought it was really mainstream, something everybody would have an opinion on one way or another, and a story that could happen on any street in America.”

And Brennan says Perez is fantastic in her role as judge.

“She listens to people and hopes everyone walks out of the courtroom in better shape than when they walked into it,” he said.

Perez, who practices immigration law in Glendale, started hosting Spanish-language court shows with “The People’s Court” on KHWY-TV Channel 22 in 1999. The show’s production company offered the show to Telemundo and they began broadcasting “Family Court” nationally and in 15 countries in 2000. Perez made her debut in English-language TV with Twentieth Television’s “Cristina’s Court” in 2006.

“This is my first Emmy,” she said. “Hopefully it won’t be the last.”

“Cristina’s Court” airs at noon and 12:30 p.m. Monday through Friday on KCOP-TV Channel 13.