

JUSTICE IS BLOND 'CRISTINA'S COURT' HATES OLD YELLERS

By MICHAEL STARR



November 14, 2007 -- **CRISTINA'S Court**" Judge Cristina Perez draws on- air inspiration from an unlikely source - original "**People's Court**" Judge Joseph Wapner.

" 'Judge Judy' [Sheindlin] is a pioneer, but the person who defines the 'court show' for me is Judge Wapner," Perez says. "He was an elegant man in the way he talked and communicated [on the air] - for him, it was about the law and justice.

"Yes, there are a lot of TV judges out there," Perez says, "but I think [Wapner] was real human . . . to me, he was a great example of great TV."

Perez, the noted immigration attorney and former host of Telemundo's "**La Corte de Familia**," "crossed over" to English-speaking with "Cristina's Court" -now in its second season (1-2 p.m./Ch. 5) and steadily scaling the syndicated ratings ladder (it's up 17 percent in households since the start of this season).

Perez isn't shy about expressing her opinions on a number of subjects - chief among them her feelings on how a TV judge should behave.

"There are a lot of 'TV court show' styles and the ones I like least are the ones that mock the litigants," she says. "We've seen some great family tragedies on 'Cristina's Court' and I'm not going to feel comfortable belittling someone's story.

"I want to make sure whoever comes to my courtroom is a little bit stronger and united . . . and I don't think TV ratings are enhanced by the decibel level.

"Shouting or demeaning [the litigants] isn't entertaining unless they deserve it."

Now that it's established itself on the court-show landscape, "Cristina's Court" has experimented a bit this season, with litigants including Butch "Eddie Munster" Patrick and New York's own "Naked Cowboy" (aka Robert Burck) - who appears tomorrow and Friday over a dispute with his girlfriend.

"The celebrities we've had are the same types of cases we had before - usually something going wrong in their business or personal relationships," Perez says.

"They feel betrayed - and come to our show for public vindication."