SAN JOSE — Kevin J. Murphy stepped into a legal quagmire in 2007 when he opted to doff his superior court judge’s black robe before his judicial term expired and become top assistant to the newly elected Santa Clara County district attorney.

Murphy, now 65 and a neutral for ADR Services Inc. here and in San Francisco, had to quickly withdraw from that job thanks to a little-known anti-moonlighting clause in the state Constitution that has frustrated other judges and is currently the subject of a lawsuit.

He said that despite the hassle, “It worked out for me. I love what I’m doing now.”

Many who’ve hired Murphy for mediations, arbitrations and case evaluations have become fans. “I’m a repeat customer,” said Allen J. Ruby of Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP & Affiliates’ Palo Alto office.

“He was a world-class judge and now he’s a world-class mediator,” Ruby said. “For complicated business disputes, he is a very thoughtful person. If a problem seems complex at the beginning, it is less so after he sorts it out. He methodically works his way there. He is thoughtful, engaged and — above all — calm.”

Murphy charges $425 per hour but said he keeps working on a case if it doesn’t end after a formal mediation. “I put in more time than I bill for,” he said. “I don’t like a system where the trial judge in front of the jury is the one who determines the value of the case and both sides were very satisfied. He determined the value of the case and came up with a nice, clean resolution. I recommend him without hesitation.”

Murphy also performs arbitrations and case evaluations. “Trial lawyers want to present a case to a trial court or a court of appeal,” he said. “They seek my opinion. It’s really fun going through a bunch of documents, [to] listen to their arguments and then give a critique. Then I get to watch the trial or appeal and hope I’m right.”

The start-and-stop stumble when Murphy first left the bench for the district attorney’s shop in 2007 resulted from his wish to serve the public in a different role after 26 years as a state trial judge, he said.

“I had to be talked into it,” he said of agreeing to work for District Attorney Dolores A. Carr, who had recently been elected. “The closing argument for me was, ‘How about doing something for your community?’ It sounds hokey and corny, I know, but it was the public service argument that swayed me. I was willing to resign to do it.”

But within hours of the announcement that Murphy was switching jobs, Carr called to say she’d learned there was a problem. The state Constitution bars judges from taking new state jobs until their terms end.

“I did some research and found the law was not settled,” Murphy said. “I fought it and create an immediate issue for a DA who’d campaigned on ethics. Or I could turn down the job and withdraw my retirement.”

Murphy said the media had fun with the messy glitch. “DA’s first move runs afoul of law,” a local newspaper headline read. “I was labeled [Carr’s] mistake No. 1. I didn’t know [about the constitutional bar]. I was a judge. I should have known. I was embarrassed. I was disappointed,” Murphy said. He withdrew from the appointment, rescinded his retirement and stayed on the bench another two years before joining ADR Services.

The anti-moonlighting rule dates from Gold Rush days and is designed to keep judges from currying favor from the bench by ruling in the favor of potential state agency employers. Currently challenging the rule is Presiding Justice Arthur Gilbert of Division 6 of the 2nd District Court of Appeal in Ventura. Gilbert sued the state controller in 2012 seeking a judicial declaration that he is eligible for a public job if he retires before his term expires in 2019.

Murphy testified against the rule at the Los Angeles trial of Gilbert’s suit, but the trial judge in July held that valid policy reasons favor the constitutional prohibition. Gilbert is currently appealing that decision.

Here are some of the lawyers who have used Kevin Murphy’s services recently:

William W. Faulkner, McManis Faulkner, San Jose; James J. Brosnan, Morrison & Foerster, San Francisco; Sarju A. Naran, Hoge Fenton Jones & Appel, San Jose; Jennifer M. Protas, Hoge Fenton Jones & Appel, San Jose; Michael J. Betz, Allen Matkins Leck Gamble & Mallory LLP, San Francisco; Natalie S. Riedman, Severson & Werson PC, San Francisco