

**Daily Herald**

**Date:** July 25, 1996

**Section:** News

**Edition:** D1

**Page:** 4

**Column:** Crime & Justice

**'Compromise Court'** keeps things civil

**Hodson & McCoppin**

The parties went in fighting and came out peacefully. In so doing, they settled the first case in what approaches a DuPage County version of the People's Court. Taxpayers may be interested to know the case took four hours to conclude, compared to more than a year that a typical civil case drags through the court.

The dispute arose between the seller of a company and the buyer, who went out of business when major clients left the firm after the sale.

As he was trained to do, mediator Vincent DiTommaso let the parties briefly vent at each other. Then he sat them in separate rooms, going back and forth between them until he found a compromise both sides could accept.

DuPage County already had an arbitration program for cases involving disputes of between \$2,500 and \$30,000. Judges have credited it for saving countless hours in court.

The new mediation program is for any suit seeking more than \$30,000.

Though arbitration is mandatory for smaller cases, mediation is voluntary.

Mediation will take place only if both parties in a dispute ask for it. The goal is to settle their disputes before they leave the table, saving the drawn-out hassle of going to trial.

If the parties cannot agree on a mediator, the court will appoint one from a list of about 31.

The mediator does not judge the case, but merely helps the parties reach an agreement.

If they cannot settle their differences, they can always slug it out in court.

Judge Ann Jorgensen, who oversees the program, said mediation is especially helpful for people and businesses who want to maintain a relationship after they've resolved their differences.