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Ryan juggles several hats to balance justice scales

By Mary Rodriguez editor

After spending two years trying to unravel 50 years of entangled bureaucracy, Michigan Supreme Court Justice James L. Ryan sees smoother sailing ahead for Wayne County courts.

Ryan, of Redford Township, stepped down last week after 13 months as acting supervising justice for Wayne County court reorganization. Under Ryan, the system had its first spring cleaning in half a century.

The massive job included abolishing two courts, Traffic and Common Pleas, and part of a third, Recorder's Court. In their place, the newly created 36th District Court highlights the first phase of an eight-year statewide project calling for the standardization of the lower court system in Michigan.

Ryan, who oversaw the transformation, leaves supervision of the newly created system to executive Justice Richard Dunn.

"Like an iceberg, the real difference is under water," Ryan explained during a recent interview in his Farmington office.

in which they (the courts) are now financed. The state introduced \$12 million into Wayne County courts."

While the administration has merged, the operations remain separate entities. Eventually, all Michigan courts will be financed by the state.

Appointed in January 1980, Ryan supervised the first transition and gave his report to Supreme Court colleagues last week.

"The difficult part was writing a first-time budget for the district court," said Ryan, who maintained a downtown Detroit office during his special assignment to be in the heart of the county court complex.

He supervised a staff of eight. The job included combining functions of Common Pleas and Traffic Court, weeding out "dead weight", and computerizing the newly created district court, he said.

"The two big problems were dealing with 12 labor unions and having the city of Detroit assume part of the cost of the court at a time when the city was broke, prior to the income tax election last June," he said.

THE NEW budget included funds for computerization and elimination of county sheriff's deputies, for courtroom

security. Hiring a private firm to look after those duties freed the deputies for other duties, Ryan said.

"No person lost a job. With the reorganization came a freezing of positions. The only loss was through attrition."

As an end result, county court workers automatically became state employees under the auspices of the Michigan Judicial Council.

While Ryan oversaw duties in Wayne County, his workload as a Supreme Court justice was not suspended.

Ryan a top justice since December 1975, has watched the number of cases appealed to the high court increase from 991 in 1976 to 2,000 last year.

"Two thousand cases a year are filed and 10 percent are accepted," he said of the high court caseload.

"It's a very troublesome thing," he said. "You can add judges at the lower (court) level but by the Constitution you can only have seven at the state level."

"We only consider the most difficult and complex, but as the numbers increase, there's not enough hours."

Ryan commuted back to his Farmington office, its walls stacked with law books and family pictures, to study case records. Much of what the justices accept is decided on inter-office conference calls via Michigan Bell.

IN LANSING, the seven top justices hear oral arguments, study briefs and write opinions.

Now that his job in Wayne County is over, Ryan, a former Wayne County Circuit Judge and township justice of the peace, again divides his time between the high court and the Michigan Judicial Institute, where he supervises educational programming for court staff.

"The fiscal and labor differences were addressed satisfactorily," he said. "There's more accountability and efficiency (in Wayne County) than ever before."

"The final piece not set into place yet is new court facilities for Detroit. The old traffic, common pleas and recorder court all operate in different locations."

Finding a new courthouse is under direction of a special task force.

A prime possibility is the J.L. Hudson warehouse at Brush and Madison, Ryan said.

"It's close access to the jail and criminal and civil courts. If funding can be arranged, we may see the 36th (district court) move in. That would complete the picture."



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

From his Farmington office, State Supreme Court Justice James L. Ryan discusses his duties on the Court and his efforts to reorganize the Wayne County court system.

Officials mull alternatives to landfills

By M.B. Dillon Ward staff writer

Farmington Hills officials are studying how best to get rid of the trash.

Currently, solid waste is dumped in a landfill just over the county line in Washtenaw County. But due to ever-stricter environmental protection legislation, the use of landfills is becoming increasingly expensive and regulated.

Oakland County is working on a \$150 million project that would "minimize the use of sanitary landfilling through resource recovery, energy conversion, recycling or whatever becomes technologically, economically and socially practicable," said George Schutte, principal engineer for the Oakland County Department of Public Works.

The county is acting in compliance with the recently passed Solid Waste Management Act which requires all Michigan counties to develop a waste management plan.

Resource recovery, also being considered by Farmington Hills, is a process whereby solid waste is incinerated to produce steam and electricity.

Water is circulated through a system of tubes welded side-to-side which encircle the burning area and act as a boiler, trapping fire and gases.

The technology was developed more than 10 years ago in Germany and Switzerland and is widely used in Europe and Japan. The system is less common in the U.S., although it is in operation in several states, Schutte said.

The plan proposed by the county would entail the construction of a plant near the Oakland County Service Center in Pontiac. It would burn 1,200 tons of refuse daily, generating steam and electricity to be sold to Detroit Edison and Consumers Power. It would also fuel the county facilities.

In total, the plan calls for seven landfill sites and three resource recovery plants.

FARMINGTON HILLS is considering a proposal by Environmental Resources Management of Southfield (EMR) to construct a resource recovery facility within Farmington Hills.

The plant, designed to handle 100

tons of refuse daily, would be constructed sometime after December 1983.

"Whether we go with the county or have our own plan, trash disposal is going to cost more," said Savage. "The difficult part of our job will be putting this thing on the ballot."

Currently budgeted for waste disposal in Farmington Hills is \$847,000, or about \$60 per household. The county's plan would add \$10-\$20 annually per house, Schutte said.

Complicating cost analysis and decision making for the city is the fact that EMR has yet to attract a customer, according to Bill Costick, assistant city manager.

EMR, involved predominantly in consulting and project development, is just getting into the refuse recovery area.

"EMR would like us to commit, but we're hesitant to do that until they have a purchaser for the energy," said Costick.

Also delaying the city's decision is the fact that no one can say whether dumping in Wayne County will be reduced in the future, he said.

"I think eventually we'll have to abide by the county plan. But no one knows how quickly the plan will be fully implemented."

ANOTHER UNKNOWN is the cost effectiveness of refuse recovery plants. There are numerous variables, and a lot depends on the energy market, Costick said.

Schutte agreed.

"It would take the county a few years to break even, if the proposed plan is adopted," he said. "There is no gold in garbage. You'd have to be a soothsayer to know what energy will cost down the line. But we figure within five to seven years it should be substantially more cost effective."

The county is seeking public comment on its proposal and will stage a public hearing at 7 p.m. March 23 in the county Commissioners' auditorium. Farmington Hills bought a little time by passing a resolution at last Monday's City Council meeting to notify the county of its ongoing evaluation of waste management plans.

Armed man robs Hills fast-food restaurant

An armed man dressed in a dark blue ski mask, hooded blue jacket and black leather gloves escaped with an unknown amount of cash from Wendy's restaurant, 37650 Eight Mile Rd. in Farmington Hills shortly after 9 p.m. Tuesday.

Brenda Bartling, 18, of Farmington

Hills was working with her back to the counter when she turned around to see a man pointing a blue steel snub-nose revolver at her.

Ms. Bartling described the man as 27-33 years old, about 6-foot and 160 pounds with a thin build.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Fire destroys house

A discarded cigarette caused a fire which destroyed a Farmington Hills house last Wednesday morning. Farmington Road was closed as firefighters fought the blaze. No one was injured. Property damage was estimated at \$69,000 and content loss at \$50,000.

\$2.9 million deficit

Walled Lake faces budget woes

Hike the millage rate, seek wage concessions, close schools and sell off property, reduce personnel or eliminate programs — these are some of the options being eyed by the Walled Lake School District as it attempts to cope with a projected \$2.86 million deficit.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Harry Carlson told the school board last week he anticipates revenues of \$23.16 million and expenses of \$26.025 million for the 1982-83 school year.

His revenue projection represents a 1.4 percent increase over 1981-82 levels of \$22.83 million. The expenses projection is 8.2 percent over 1981-82 levels of \$24.05 million.

Carlson said the budget is tentative and subject to revision because certain factors that could alter it are either not available yet or subject to change in the months ahead.

The revenue projections were based on the assumption of a 5 percent increase in the district's State Equalized Valuation (SEV), he added.

"The state and the county are currently battling over assessments and it could end up in litigation. I've used a 5 percent figure in projecting revenues, but I'm fearful that the actual increase might well be in the area of 3 percent," Carlson said.

CARLSON SAID an administrative budget committee already has recommended cuts in programs and personnel totalling \$1,463 million.

About 67 percent, or \$790,000, of those cuts involves teaching personnel.

But even if the recommended cuts were implemented, the district would still need to cut an additional \$1,178 million to balance the 1982-83 budget.

Some of the "Options for Further Consideration" as presented by the ad-

ministrative budget committee include:

- Close an elementary school — \$125,000.
- Eliminate morning and afternoon elementary recess activities and curricular art and music classes — \$214,000.
- Cut schedule from seven to six periods for junior high and from six to five in the senior high — \$191,000.
- Combine outdoor education with community education — \$15,000.

• Discontinue bus service within 1 1/2 miles of schools — \$35,000.

Other options include:

- Rent or lease school facilities.
- Renegotiate contracts with district employee unions.
- Sell property.
- Conduct a millage election.

If the board decides a tax hike is the solution, Superintendent Don Sheldon said the special election should be in May.

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