

13 in race

Judicial candidates eye faster justice

By JOE MANTUCCI

Thirteen candidates, including two incumbents, are vying for four six-year terms on the Oakland County circuit court bench.

Incumbent judges Robert Webster and James Thorburn are seeking reelection. The other two vacancies were created by the retirements of judges William Hampton and Arthur Moore.

The field of 13 hopefuls will be narrowed to eight in the August primary, with the top four vote getters in November earning the sought-after posts.

Besides incumbents Webster and Thorburn, the field of contenders includes four district court judges and seven attorneys.

Newly appointed Circuit Court Judge Steven Andrews faces no opposition in either the primary or the November election. Oak Park attorney Stuart Brickner had filed for Andrews' unopposed seat, but his nominating petitions were determined to be defective.

The circuit court is a court of general jurisdiction handling both civil and criminal matters. Civil cases must be those in

which the damages in dispute exceed \$10,000. Criminal cases handled in circuit court include high misdemeanors and felonies.

CIRCUIT COURT candidates were asked by the Observer & Eccentric to provide biographical information and to answer several questions. One query which elicited some interesting responses from the judicial hopefuls was: What can be done to provide faster justice?

Background information on the candidates and their responses to that question follow:

DAVID F. BRECK: Breck, 46, of 752 Wilksa, Birmingham, has been a practicing attorney for 18 years. He attended Cranbrook School and was graduated from Michigan State University and the University of Michigan Law School.

Breck has been a Birmingham city commissioner for 14 years and served two terms as mayor. He was director of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) for seven years and chairman of the SEMTA board in 1971. Breck was an Oakland County assistant prosecuting attorney for two years. He is a member of various bar associations, the American Trial Lawyers Association, the Birmingham-Bloomfield-Hunterdon Relations Council, and several other civic and community organizations.

Breck said the following improvements could be made to expedite the handling of cases in circuit court:

- "Alleviating 'legal pollution' by relegating some matters to administrative tribunals and mediation panels."
- "Enforcing a 'standby docket' so that cases aren't adjourned time after time."
- "Employing the 'half day trial' system used by Judge Webster so that trials continue uninterrupted from 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m."

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CHRISTOPHER C. BROWN: Brown, 37, resides at 31 Henry Clay, Pontiac. He is currently a judge in the 16th District Court, which serves Pontiac.

Brown received a BA degree from Wayne State University and a law degree from Detroit College of Law. Brown served on the Pontiac Board of Education from 1968-1972 and was elected to the district court bench in 1973. He is also a board member of the Oakland County Legal Aid Society and the Pontiac Area Urban League.

Brown said judges should be required to work full days and to demand timely appearances by all litigants and attorneys. He also suggested the establishment of a separate divorce court.

ROBERT W. CARR: Carr, 47, of 7380 Maceday Lake Road, Waterford, has been an attorney for 17 years. He received a BA from the University of Michigan, a master's of Literature from the University of Pittsburgh, and a law degree from the Detroit College of Law.

Carr is a partner in the law firm of Peres, Carr, Jacques, Ratcliff, and Schmitt. He was an assistant Oakland County prosecutor from 1959-1960 and justice of the peace in Independence Township from 1965-1969.

He belongs to the Birmingham and Drayton-Waterford Kiwanis and the Clarkson Band Boosters.

Carr said the use of meaningful pre-trial conferences with attorneys and litigants, held somewhat before the date set for trial, would foster settlement of many controversies and assure those set for trial would actually be tried.

These conferences could be set in early morning or late afternoon, he added, without interfering with the court's trial schedule.

S. JAMES CLARKSON: Clarkson, 31, of 22325 Valley View Drive, Southfield, is a judge of the 46th district court, which serves Southfield.

He is a graduate of Northeastern University and the Detroit College of Law. Clarkson was a state representative in 1959 and 1960 and was mayor of Southfield from 1961-1969. He was elected to the district court bench in 1969 and 1973. Clarkson is a member of various bar associations, in addition to the Michigan and American judges' associations.

Clarkson is a board member of the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Center and of Kingwood Hospital. He belongs to the Southfield Optimists and the High-Twelve Club.

Civil matters, Clarkson said, can sometimes be settled through the use of pre-trial hearings. "If elected, I would like to reschedule pre-trial hearings whenever possible," he said.

Because the criminal call takes priority and is directly related to law enforcement, the circuit court must insist on an increase in the number of judges available to handle the case load, without forcing the prosecutor's office "to resort to plea bargaining because of a crowded docket."

MARSHALL DENNER: The 35-year-old Denner is a graduate of Wayne State University and Detroit College of Law. He resides at 24877 Condon, Oak Park, and is president of the law firm of Levenson, Denner, Ruby and Frutman.

Denner is currently a volunteer legal advisor to the Oak Park Senior Citizens.

The attorney said hard work, treatment of persons as individuals and a careful study of existing legislative trends in our society, such as separate divorce courts and a different attitude toward victimless crimes, would expedite circuit court matters.

ALICE L. GILBERT: Gilbert, 44, is a Birmingham resident. She has been a judge for 15 years and is currently sitting on the 4th District Court bench.

Gilbert's educational background included Wellesley College, Northwestern University, Wayne State University and University of Detroit Law schools, and Harvard

Graduate School. She also attended the National College of State Judiciary and the University of Nevada.

Ms. Gilbert was a practicing attorney for 12 years before becoming a judge. She was president of the Michigan District Judges Association (where she is currently serving on its rules committee) and was also president of the Oakland County District Judges Association.

Ms. Gilbert said, "Every person involved in a controversy before a court is entitled to a prompt, fair and impartial disposition of the matter. A judge must accept full responsibility for the prompt administration of justice."

"Consideration should be given to adopting modern business methods in circuit court administration, due to the success experienced in the 46th district court, where I am presently chief judge."

Ms. Gilbert added that she favors maintaining the circuit court docket with data processing.

EVAN KARABETOS: The 43-year-old Karabetos, of 515 Madison, Birmingham, received his BA from Michigan State University and his law degree from Wayne State University. Karabetos also holds an MA from New York University and is a part-time English instructor at Oakland Community College.

Karabetos is a member of various bar associations, an American Arbitration Association arbitrator, and an advisor for the Oakland Community College paralegal program.

Said Karabetos: "Tinkering with the system will not cure this ill, and safe campaign platforms or assertions proclaiming how well the court is operating belie the facts—a major overhaul is needed."

Karabetos said he advocates informal and private processes to work out minor disputes greater use of the arbitration process, and new ways to compensate for injuries without distorted insurance costs and years of delay.

He also cited the need for high school programs to train people to represent themselves in simple court matters.

BERNARD L. KAUFMAN: Kaufman, 46, of 5384 Clondike Lane, West Bloomfield, has been a trial and appellate attorney for 23 years.

He received his bachelors and two law degrees from Wayne State University. Kaufman is an associate editor of the Journal of American Trial Lawyers Association and has been appointed an arbitrator for the American Arbitration Association and as counsel to a special panel of the Inter-

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