

Mrs. Gage urges use of mediators

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

You see her billboards up and down Oakland County's main drag. Her publicity packets proclaim her the "woman of the hour."

A Bloomfield Township resident, campaigning for one of three Oakland Circuit Court judgeships, Hilda Gage, 38, is running a polished and costly campaign.

Behind the polish, Mrs. H. Gage is quick, concise and, like several other can didates, unafraid to criticize the court for its shortcomings and offer suggestions.

IN AN ERA when the court is heavily pressed by increasing civil litigation and backlogged criminal dockets, Mrs. Gage said experienced mediators should be employed to resolve civil conflicts.

"The mediators," she said, "would render a money award. If the parties reject the award, the matter can go to trial. If the judge's award varies less than 10 per cent from the mediator's award, the party rejecting the award would be assessed with a stiff financial penalty."

Mrs. Gage predicted that such a system would be successful and would free up more courtroom time.

Arbitrators, she said, could also be used to handle many divorce cases.

Not only would the system require the consent of the Michigan State Supreme Court, she said, but once in practice it would require the consent of both parties.



HILDA GAGE

"It would save the taxpayers and the people involved a lot of dollars."

"The costs of paying an arbitrator are minimal to the cost of attorneys and the money required to try a case."

IN THE SAME spirit of trying to resolve more cases outside the courtroom, Mrs. Gage said that in an ideal courtroom in an ideal courthouse, a special room might be set aside for attorneys and clients to meet and hammer out agreements.

"I believe," she said, "that the courtroom is a tremendous motivator in resolving disputes. And we should make maximum use of it."

Again, she said, such a "negotiating room" would free up more court time for civil cases which cannot be resolved and criminal cases which are supposed to be tried within 180 days of arrest.

MRS. GAGE, who has a background in criminal law, family law and personal injury cases, echoed the criticism of her fellow lawyers in complaining about several unnamed judges who regularly postpone and interrupt trials.

"Some cases start and stop consistently," she said.

"I would like to see trials never interrupted. I'd try cases from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. every day," she said. Afternoons would be reserved for other court-related matters.

She might have problems in changing established Oakland Circuit Court rules which reserve Wednesdays as "motion day," bringing hundreds of attorneys to the Oakland County Courthouse on a variety of matters excluding actual trials.

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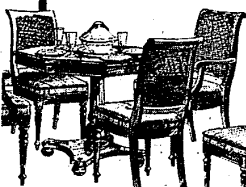
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