

Fosters fathers' cause

Judge stumps for paternal custody rights

By SHIRLEE IDEN

They can't get pregnant or bear a child, but they're parents just the same. A feisty Oakland County judge told a group of fathers, stepmothers and a few children on Thursday evening, they must fight for fathers' rights.

Speaking to a gathering of about 80 persons at the Adlai Stevenson School in Southfield, Judge William Beer, told an Equal Rights for Fathers group that custody should not be awarded according to gender.

"Every female will not automatically be a good mother," he said to loud applause.

The father's equality group, which encompasses Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties, is part of a growing movement battling for what they call their constitutional rights.

While most persons hark back to "inalienable rights" once a year on July 4, those involved in the battle for their parental rights are fighting a daily battle.

And because each movement needs its hero, William Beer has become larger than life to the embattled fathers.

The septuagenarian judge, a member of the circuit bench for 20 years since his appointment by the governor, is no stranger to controversy.

He incurred the wrath of feminists unofficially and Oakland County NOW officially in his controversial decision two years ago concerning Dr. Don Krohn, who was accused of second degree sexual misconduct.

He found Dr. Krohn not guilty of the criminal charges against him after hearing testimony that the doctor suffered amnesia as a result of stress and alcohol.

More recently, the judge attempted to overcome legal restrictions against his running for re-election because of his age.

Judge Beer, who has presided over many divorces in his years on the bench, became a hero to the those supporting fathers' rights when he announced this spring that he would preside over no divorce involving children where joint custody was not considered.

For this stand the Equal Rights for Fathers group made him their "Man of the Year" and presented him with a plaque Thursday evening.

"It's a milestone for us to have a judge come to our home grounds," said Alan Lebow, president of the group, in introducing Judge Beer.

Lebow admitted prior to the speech that to the group, most lawyers and judges are the enemy.

"Judge Beer is the first member of

the judiciary to support our cause," he said. "He always said that children are never divorced from their parents."

A STANDING ovation greeted the white-haired judge before he had uttered a word.

"In Oakland County," he began, "one out of three are certain to be divorced and with thousands of children involved..."

"What this country really needs is not just Mother's Day and Father's Day but Parent's Day to recognize the act of mothers and fathers together."

"The dissolution of marriage shouldn't end the role of either parent," Judge Beer said his support of joint custody is based on a feeling that his first concern must be the child.

"The child suffers most in divorce," he said. "A couple can be divorced from themselves, but as long as there are children, they can never be divorced as parents."

He said the interest of both parents must be sustained to make decisions about whether young people should smoke or drink and other decisions.

"As divorce stands now, a father can be a frustrated bystander, and this often means a great deal of anger," he said. "Joint custody may relieve antagonism and prevent children from becoming pawns."

"The saddest cases to see in any court are those where children are dragged in. Joint custody gives kids the assurance they still have both parents."

Pointing out that children in divorce cases automatically become wards of the court, Beer said no judge can really exercise authority intelligently over all of those children.

"JOINT CUSTODY reminds the new married partner that they have nothing to say about the child of the first marriage," he said. "A new spouse can at best be a friend."

The judge emphasized that the courts cannot force joint custody on parents, that it is offered as an alternative to single parent custody.

"My heart has been twisted many times in divorce cases where there were children," he concluded. "Let's hope for equal rights for fathers."

As it had begun, Judge Beer's talk ended with a standing ovation.

No questions were allowed as the judge explained he is not permitted to give legal advice.

For Mahlon Green of Walled Lake, what Judge Beer said made good sense. One of a group of 150 persons who marched in the rain in Washington on Father's Day, Green said his rights as a parent have been violated.

"This is the first meeting I've attend-

ed, but I picketed years ago for equal rights for fathers," he said. "The Friend of the Court took my rights of parenting away when my children were young."

David Kruger of Southfield said he was the same as any other man at the meeting — unhappy.

"I have three children and the custody of one right now. I'm in the middle of a fight to get the custody of the other two," he said.

"THERE ARE situations where there's a clearcut case of the woman not being the best parent and still they get custody," he said. "A man has three strikes against him in custody cases."

Kruger said the way things are now, a man winds up divorced from his children as well as his wife.

"One of our goals is to move divorce and custody out of the court system and an adversary situation," he said.

Although parenting problems are affecting them right now, Debbie and Rick Simon can't even afford a family

of their own.

The Redford Township couple, who have been married two years, pay \$150 each week in child support for Simon's two daughters, 10 and 12, from a previous marriage.

"We can't afford our own child and the ex-wife is giving us problems on visitation as well," Mrs. Simon said. "One girl was very ill in the hospital, and the mother told her she'd never let her see her father again."

She said her husband has been denied visits to the girls or even the privilege of speaking to them on the phone.

ALAN LEBOW, the rights group president, said the tri-county group was put together in March of this year. Declining to state what their paid membership is, he said they have a mailing list of about 500.

"We have no national group, but there are about 240 groups organized around the country," he said.

Property tax relief aim of Ross's bills

State Senator Doug Ross, D-Oak Park, recently introduced the Property Tax Instant Relief Acts in the Michigan State Senate.

"These measures would provide hundreds of thousands of homeowners with their property tax relief when they need it — when their property taxes are due, not months later," Ross said.

The bills allow homeowners to use their state property tax credit to pay their local treasurer. Currently homeowners must pay their total property tax bill and wait for the state to process their paper work and send the property tax relief check, often months later.

"We must stop designing systems that meet only the needs of bureaucrats and start meeting peoples' needs," explained Ross.

"At this time, the state doesn't relieve anyone's property taxes. We reimburse people who have already survived the property tax bite."

Michigan paid more than \$300 million in property tax relief in 1977 that benefited nearly a million and a quarter households.

For senior citizens, the state pays the first \$1,200 of their property tax bill if their income is below \$3,000. Seniors with incomes between \$3,000 and \$6,000 pay a percentage of their income in property tax and the state pays the balance of up to \$1,200. If a senior citizen's income is more than \$6,000, he pays up to 3.5 percent of his income in property taxes and the state pays up to \$1,200 of the remainder of the property tax bill.

FOR NON-SENIORS, the state pays 60 percent of any property tax bill in excess of 3.5 percent of the person's income.

"Unfortunately, many people who are eligible for property tax credits don't know about them and the money arrives long after they've struggled to pay the tax. These bills cover the second problem and hopefully a simpler system will be used by more eligible property taxpayers," Ross said.

Under the bills, a homeowner who is eligible for a property tax relief credit could authorize their city treasurer to draw the credit directly from the Mich-

igan state treasurer. The homeowner would only have to pay the difference between the property tax relief credit and their property tax bill — if there was any.

"The Property Tax Instant Relief Acts will insure that no senior citizen in Michigan will be forced out of his or her home by rising property taxes. Combined with the state's present property tax laws, this proposal will provide seniors with ironclad property tax inflation protection," Ross said.

To assist taxpayers with their upcoming winter property tax bills, these bills must be passed by late September.

Ross indicated that he was confident that the deadline could be met.

"The Michigan Democratic Party passed a resolution at the last convention supporting this kind of proposal. I'm confident the Democrat Party will help to move the measure quickly through the Legislature."

The Oak Park Democrat also said he was heartened by the strong commitment to the bill by the other Democratic members of the Senate Finance committee, Chairman Gary Corbin, D-Cllo, and Gilbert DiNello, D-East Detroit, who have co-sponsored the bills.

Griswold earns DVM

John D. Griswold of Farmington Hills has earned a doctor of veterinary medicine degree from Michigan State University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

He was among 65 stu-

dents to receive the degree. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Richard F. Griswold, 32247 Bonnell Hill Farmington Hills. He is a 1973 graduate of North Farmington High School.

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OAKLAND COUNTY ROAD COMMISSION

NOTICE OF DESIGN STUDY REPORT APPROVAL

BY THE FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION FOR TEN MILE ROAD AND GRAND RIVER INTERSECTION IN THE CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS PROJECT NO. 2773014

The Oakland County Road Commission has successfully completed the Location and Design Study Report for the widening of Ten Mile Road to five (5) lanes with curb and gutter from 1+6 to Grand River Avenue, and the widening and realignment of the Ten Mile Road/Grand River Avenue intersection.

Notice is hereby given, as required by Federal Aid Highway Program Manual 7-7.5, that approval of the Location and Design Study Report for the above described project was received on May 24, 1979. Receipt of such approval by the Federal Highway Administration and the Michigan Department of Transportation signals the start of the construction phase of this project. The Oakland County Road Commission will now proceed to final design, right-of-way acquisition and construction.

The Location and Design Study Report, the final Environmental Assessment, and all backup materials are available for public inspection and copying at the Oakland County Road Commission offices, 31001 Lakser Road (at 13 Mile Road), Beverly Hills. They are available between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 4:45 P.M.

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