

Legal aid shrinks as need grows

Many more low-income families are requesting free legal aid today than 10 years ago, but there are fewer dollars to fund the services.

"Since President Reagan (took office), our federal funding has been cut by more than half," said Dorothy Cottrell, director of Oakland-Livingston Legal Aid for the past 10 years.

Federal money helps pay for most of the non-profit organization's services. A small portion of Legal Aid's revenue comes from such organizations as United Foundation, United Community Services, Area Agency on Aging and United Way of Pontiac.

"We have to turn away some clients or put them on a waiting list because we don't have the staff to help them out," Cottrell added.

CUTBACKS IN federal funding forced the director to reduce her staff of attorneys from 10 to three.

Besides staff reductions, three Legal Aid branch offices — one for Hispanics in Pontiac, another in Ferndale and a third in Livingston County — were shut down.

A branch in Royal Oak Township and another facility for senior citizens in Pontiac remain open.

"I've been through two recessions and have learned to just take each day as it comes," Cottrell said. "But most of my staff hasn't been through this before. It's debilitating for them to come in every day not knowing whether they're going to have a job."

"We all pitch in like a family to keep the place going," she added. "We don't have a receptionist. Secretaries, paralegals and attorneys take turns answering calls."

"It has made us more aware of how important our jobs are and how important it is to keep in touch with the client. If you hear the same sad story

over and over again, you become more involved."

COTTRELL SAID many families asking for assistance are among the so-called "new poor" or recently unemployed.

"They're not bank presidents standing on street corners with tin cups, but they're pretty bad off," she said.

Legal Aid staffs handle family law matters such as divorce, separation child abuse and custody cases, housing complaints and general assistance (Social Security, ADC, unemployment benefits) problems.

Bar to honor Cottrell

A group of Oakland County judges and attorneys is trying to help alleviate Oakland-Livingston Legal Aid's financial woes.

The group, called Friends of Dorothy Cottrell and Oakland-Livingston Legal Aid, will sponsor a fund-raiser on Feb. 10.

The reception, honoring Cottrell, Legal Aid's director of the past 10 years, is planned from 5:30-8 p.m. at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Elbert Hatchett, 285 West Hickory Grove, Bloomfield Hills.

Speakers for the event will include Judge James S. Thorburn of Oakland County Circuit Court; Judge Carl F. Ingraham of 48th District Court; Hanley M. Gurwin, president, Oakland County Bar Association; and James L. Cameron, past president, Legal Aid Board of Trustees.

Tickets at \$25 per person will be available at the door. Reservations may be made with the Legal Aid office, 332-9175.

State to replace 2 Oakland bridges

Two bridge replacement projects — one on 10 Mile Road over the Rouge River in Southfield and another on General Motors Road over the Huron River in Milford — are among 83 approved by the Michigan Department of Transportation.

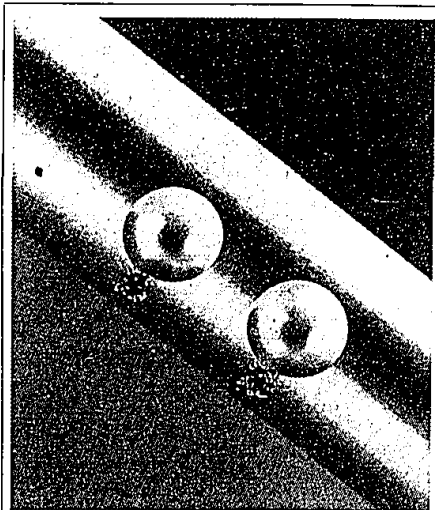
The Southfield project is expected to cost \$287,500, and the Milford \$284,500. Both will be paid for with funds from the Federal Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program and the State Critical Bridge Program.

According to MDOT Director John P. Woodford, the federal government passed out \$19.9 million this year to re-

place Michigan bridges. The state's program allocates \$5 million annually for bridge work.

"Transportation funding bills approved by Congress in December substantially increased the revenues available for bridge replacement and other improvements on highways, roads and streets," Woodford said.

"Bridges in Michigan and throughout the country have been deteriorating faster than they are being replaced. The additional funding will enable the counties and cities to build some badly needed bridges. But we should be spending upward of \$30 million a year to keep pace with the needs."



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