

# Court duty won't intimidate new appointee

## carrier of the month Farmington

By Carol Axelson  
staff writer

"No matter how high a man rises, he still has to sit on his bottom."

The quote by French essayist Montaigne is inscribed on a ceramic plate that sits in plain view on John Shepherd's desk.

It neatly sums up the new Michigan Court of Appeals judge's philosophy of life.

"That's the way I feel," said Shepherd, a 48-year-old Southfield attorney who was appointed last week to a seat in the court's Lansing district.

"A judge is accorded great respect because of the position he holds," Shepherd said. "But I've never felt in awe when appearing before a judge. Consequently, I don't think people should make a big fuss over me."

Gov. James J. Blanchard, who named Shepherd from a field of 26 candidates, called him an "outstanding lawyer and a compassionate human being." He appointed Shepherd to fill the vacancy caused by last fall's election of Michael J. Cavanagh to the state Supreme Court.

Shepherd's modesty doesn't overshadow his obvious "delight."

"I'm excited about the challenge," he said. "For many lawyers, it's a culmination of their life's ambition."

"The Appeals Court is a court of last resort for most people in Michigan. It's a busy, dynamic court."

"Judges are there on the firing line hearing all kinds of cases. And, they have the opportunity to set precedents."

Shepherd said his 23 years of experience in various aspects of law will equip him for his new job on the bench.

AMONG THE highlights of his career are stints as a "courtroom lawyer for the U.S. government" trying cases involving whiskey moonshiners and in-

terstate auto thieves and as a special assistant attorney general prosecuting the infamous "Black Book" case involving after-hours gambling operations at the Grecian Gardens restaurant in Grosse Pointe.

In addition to his full-time law work, Shepherd has made a part-time career of actively campaigning for Democratic party candidates — from G. Mennen Williams to James J. Blanchard. He also has served on the now-defunct Michigan Fair Campaign Practices Commission.

A CHAMPION OF Civil Rights causes, Shepherd headed up the now-defunct Project Equality of Michigan — a movement organized in the 1960s by leaders of major religious faiths in the Detroit area. It was formed to promote equal employment opportunities for minorities.

A partner in the Southfield law firm Sommers, Schwartz, Silver and Schwartz for the past 18 years, Shepherd began his law career in 1960 at the bottom of the proverbial totem pole.

After earning a juris doctor degree from the University of Michigan and studying on a Fulbright Scholarship at the University of Paris, he returned to Detroit to go to work.

Practicing in a "neighborhood law office" on Eight Mile in Detroit, he handled small business, divorce and minor criminal cases.

A few years later, he moved up the ladder to politics. "Before I became an assistant U.S. attorney, Gubow — who knew my father — took me to the Democratic state convention in Grand Rapids."

"It was a three-year intensive education in trying lawsuits," Shepherd recalled. "I was down there in the trenches fighting every day."

As an assistant U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan, Shepherd tried a variety of cases involving whiskey moonshiners, income tax evaders and interstate auto thieves.

"The biggest case — which took me two years to prepare — was a major scandal involving the storage of government grain."

"A southern Michigan warehouseman was accused of stealing and selling government grain. We had to prove that the grain he was selling belonged to the government. We did and won the case."

WHILE TRYING CASES for the U.S. government, he had an opportunity to work with and develop a long-lasting friendship with the late Lawrence Gubow, then the U.S. attorney.

"Gubow was my friend. But he was also the kind of lawyer I'd like to be. He was a hard worker and a man with integrity. He called things the way he saw them."

It was Gubow who introduced Shepherd to the world of politics. "Before I became an assistant U.S. attorney, Gubow — who knew my father — took me to the Democratic state convention in Grand Rapids."

"After that, I became involved with campaigns in the 17th Congressional District, picking envelopes and walking door-to-door (stumping) for candidates."

Shepherd actively campaigned for several Democratic candidates from G. Mennen Williams (now Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court), during his unsuccessful campaign for a senate seat in 1966 to James Blanchard, both in his congressional and gubernatorial races.

Another hallmark of Shepherd's career was a brief stint as a special assistant attorney general during the late 1960s.

"THE MOST SIGNIFICANT" case I prosecuted was the Black Book case," Shepherd said. "It was called that because when the police raided the Grecian Gardens restaurant in Grosse Pointe, they found a black book with the names of police officers who had been bribed by the restaurant owner."

"A one-man Wayne County grand jury alleged that the owner of the restaurant was bribing Detroit police officers to overlook an after-hours drinking and gambling operation."

"It took three weeks to try the case. My opponents — the late Joe Louisell, the top criminal attorney in Detroit at the time — and James Daner — now a Macomb County Circuit Judge — were tough guys."

There was enough evidence to indict the owner and several police officers, but it was difficult to overcome the restaurant's reputation in the community.

"He was a well-known, colorful Detroit figure. The defense brought forth a parade of prominent people — including television celebrities, prominent businessmen and a priest — to be character witnesses."

"But the evidence was so overwhelming that the jury convicted him."

After the trial, Shepherd ran into the restaurant owner in another courtroom. "He tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'You know, Mr. Shepherd, I want to tell you the God's truth. They accused me of bribing that police officer and I don't remember if I did or not.'"

Although that may have been the most widely publicized case Shepherd has won, it's one of several victories he considers the result of hard work and just "digging out the facts."

"There's too much emphasis placed upon the flamboyance of lawyers," he said. "Many times, it's hard, dull work. Digging out the facts, not gimmicks, is what wins the kinds of cases I handle."

### Brian Haskin

Brian Haskin, 16, an 11th grader at Southfield Christian High School, delivers the Farmington Observer in the Lincolnshire Estates. He began his paper route in July 1981.

An A student, Brian said his favorite subjects are math and science although he is involved with the drama club and is a section editor on the yearbook staff. Brian's hobbies include acting and writing.

He eventually plans to attend medical school at either the University of Michigan, Michigan State University or Wayne State University.

The son of Dale and Jacqueline Haskin, Brian has two sisters, Jenny, 14, and Cindy, 12.

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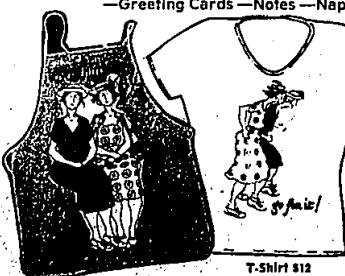
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