

Attorney makes time to serve Michigan

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relatively little," Ellmann said. "I also realized what an opportunity we have in the United States. It gave me my first appreciation of what great things we have in the country. I'm paying through public service for all the U.S. has done for me."

Following the war, Ellmann finished his bachelor's degree at the University of Michigan. After working in construction, Ellmann gave into his interest in law and entered the Wayne State University School of Law. The year was 1948. After an intensive year-round program, Ellmann graduated and was admitted to the State Bar of Michigan in 1951.

"In 1951, my father commented that someday law and public rela-

tions would be synonymous. How do you relate to the issues? How do you reconcile various interests? Law and living is all public relations," Ellmann said.

Ellmann acknowledges that entering law school somewhat later in life than most helped him in his practice and in his public service. While he respects the law, he does not feel bound by its time-honored traditions and resistance to change. "I am an activist by nature and I like to move things," he said.

ELLMANN'S QUOTABLE dialogue and jovial personality, combined with his passion for forging compromise between people on hard-fast opposing sides, has greatly contributed to his political success.

One testament to this success is that as a card-carrying Democrat, Ellmann's appointments to the Mackinac Island and Employment Relations commissions were made by former Republican Gov. William Milliken. Ellmann was also the first Democrat to become president of the State Bar of Michigan.

"Politics, the more time you spend in it, is really a reconciliation process between views. Government in any form is consensus. It is not necessarily what I want. It is a question of bringing people together. The key question is how to handle adversity and make it constructive," he said.

And that's exactly what he does. Whether it was during his six-year tenure on the Mackinac Island Park Commission or his continuing work as

chairman of the three-member Michigan Employment Relations Commission, talking with people and prompting them to push for change is what Ellmann loves to do.

"I enjoy settling disputes. I enjoy creating an atmosphere in which to settle disputes. It's something you develop from tough experience. I think it is in your gut. Yet at the same time, I think you can learn it. It's like becoming a minister, lawyer, psychologist or sociologist. Labor relations is public relations."

OFTEN, OPPOSING sides in a labor dispute are not that far apart in their desires. But more often than not, the issue boils down to personality differences. "You have accomplished your goal when the people on strike go back to work," Ellmann added.

But Ellmann looks to both parties in a dispute to settle their differences. During the recent strike by union employees at WDIV-Channel 4, Ellmann — concerned about the standoff between labor and management — went to the top in an effort to settle differences. He wired Katharine Graham, publisher of the Washington Post, which owns the television station, urging her "active participation" in ending the negotiating process.

And true to his passion and seriousness for work, Ellmann included his home telephone on the telegram to Graham. She responded several days before the strike's end.

His tenacity was no less great during his tenure on the Mackinac Island State Park Commission. As in his law practice or on the Michigan Employ-

ment Relations Commission, Ellmann used his skills as a negotiator and mediator to get things accomplished on the northern Michigan Island.

Under his leadership, the Mackinac Island commission obtained more money for the island than any of the former commissions, completed a bike path and pushed for the opening of Mill Creek — a reconstructed logging mill between Mackinaw City and Cheboygan. And he succeeded in obtaining 19 acres from the Mackinac Bridge Authority. Ellmann hopes a museum will be built on the acreage.

WHILE SERVING on both state commissions — as far as anyone knows, the only person to do so simultaneously — Ellmann was known as a man with at least seven or eight telephone numbers. They included his home, offices in Lansing, Grand Rapids and Detroit, as well as three numbers at the Michigan Employment Relations Commission.

When his term on the park commission was about to expire last year, Gov. James Blanchard, concerned about Ellmann's heavy workload, asked him to choose which commission appointment he preferred to keep.

The Michigan Employment Relations Commission — a paid appointment — won. And he hasn't regretted his choice, although he does miss working for Mackinac Island.

Yet, he'll freely admit the work is time consuming. Ellmann estimates that he devoted at least 750,000 hours a year to the park commission. "Every chairmanship is a full-time job," he said.

But, he added, his family — his wife, Sheila and three grown children — have provided the support "that has carried me through."

AT PRESENT, Ellmann is working to have the Employment Relations Commission actively work with the state Department of Commerce in developing methods of helping business. Ellmann is convinced commission members can do more to improve the nature of business in the state.

"I pioneered that approach. We want to cooperate with the commerce department to determine what the real basis of a dispute is. I am trying to make it (labor commission) all the more embracing. I want to know what all the problems (in business) are other than the union."

Through his own experiences, especially in labor relations and politics, Ellmann is convinced changes are required in the work world as well as in education if workers are to become satisfied with what they do for a living.

"People are disillusioned. They don't know what to expect in employment. Management has to spend more time making work enjoyable," he said.

"Most things I have wanted, I have accomplished. But I have never found anything easy in my life. When one works hard, people around you appreciate it, hopefully," he said.

In fact, Ellmann said he would like people to remember two very simple things about him: "I've learned how to work and I never took advantage of anyone."

Interchange fate unclear

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Specifically, the improvements that must be made include widening 12 Mile from Orchard Lake to Novi roads to a "multi-lane facility." Officials should also monitor 12 Mile between Beck and Novi roads and, as development plans become known, appropriate road improvements should be planned, according to the study.

The MDOT study also suggests that "revenue availability will affect the timing of proposed improvement projects. The Michigan Department of Transportation, local jurisdictions, and the private sector should complete, in conjunction with the recommended design and environmental studies, the exploration of options for funding recommended improvements."

Farmington Hills City Council created a TIFA district Dec. 16 and designated the geographic boundaries in which the financing mechanism would be used. Farmington Public Schools officials — who have publicly opposed the measure — have more than half of the 60-day period (from Dec. 30) to respond to the city's creation of the authority.

But on Jan. 16, school officials received an opinion on the state's TIFA Act that confirms their primary argument that the city cannot create a TIFA to help finance 12 Mile improvements if property values along the corridor are not declining.

GRAHAM LEWIS, acting superintendent, last week said the city will have to determine its next course of action in light of Kelley's opinion. In turn,

Mayor Joe Alkateeb has said, "the ball is in the school board's court. We have made our plan known. We are saying again and again, we want to cooperate."

Despite the receipt of Kelley's opinion more than a week ago, neither the Farmington Hills City Council nor Farmington Board of Education has discussed the matter in a public meeting. The state's Open Meetings Act of 1976 allows public officials to meet in closed session to discuss legal strategy with an attorney.

But prior to council's adoption of its resolution endorsing MDOT's I-696 improvement plans Monday, Farmington Hills resident Aldo Vagnozzi questioned council on the status of the TIFA proposal in light of Kelley's opinion.

"We did what we had to do. We aren't going to do anything in the near future," Alkateeb said, adding there is no action for city officials to take in reaction to the attorney general's opinion.

In response to Vagnozzi's inquiry whether Kelley's opinion is legally binding on the city, attorney Paul Bibeau said, "I don't agree with your assessment of the weight you give an attorney general's report. The attorney general has interpreted a statute..."

VAGNOZZI SUGGESTED that city officials develop a contingency plan "in case TIFA falls through. I would hate to see us get involved in a lengthy legal hassle with the school board."

Whether school officials will pursue

legal action to prevent the city from using tax increment financing to help finance 12 Mile improvements is still unknown. "It's still in closed session," Lewis said.

School trustees are expected to discuss Kelley's opinion in closed session at their meeting Feb. 11. School trustees are also expected to discuss the issue public that night following the closed session.

But school officials are also waiting for a response from city officials, who said they would "respond to us in two weeks (as of Jan. 16)," Lewis said.

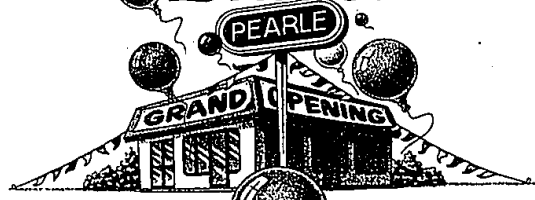
Obviously, Lewis continued, school officials have the option of taking no action — allowing the city to continue with TIFA — or taking action of some type.

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