

# Five cameras cover most of Lippitt's court

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

A couple of glitches developed on the first day of Oakland County's experiment in videotaping a circuit court proceeding.

But Circuit Judge Norman L. Lippitt and court administrator Joan E. Young said they are confident the problems — both involving camera angles — can be corrected by next week.

"I'm non-mechanical," confessed Lippitt, an attorney in Southfield before his 1987 appointment, "but I see the value of the new technology."

"I videotape my two daughters," said Young, a Birmingham resident, "so I'm not afraid of the technology."

WITH HIS COURT reporter retiring, Lippitt, the circuit bench's newest member, volunteered for the experiment, which involves five voice-activated videotape cameras recording faces and sounds. The experiment started Monday.

One problem, detected by his clerk, Andy Grifka, stemmed from placement of an attorney's lectern between the lawyers' tables. When the speaker turned his head to the left, the plaintiff's table's microphone and camera picked up his voice and face — which was OK.

When the speaker turned right, however, the microphone on the defendant's table picked up his voice — but the camera angle wasn't wide enough to catch his face.

The problem was solved, temporarily, by shifting the lectern closer to the left table.

The problem is minor because only the words are needed for official records.

The second problem was that no camera could pick up diagrams on the courtroom chalk board. Attorneys will have to use an easel within camera range.

Otherwise, everyone seemed pleased with the system.

ONE OAKLAND and one Kalamazoo circuit courtroom were selected by the state Supreme Court to test the equipment, which, even with videotape costs, will be cheaper than a full-time stenographer's salary and benefits.

The experiment is expected to be successful. In Kentucky, where the movement began, nearly all courtrooms use videotaping for records, Young said.

"Transcripts (typed copies of testimony) can be prepared, but the person doesn't have to be in the courtroom," she said.

Attorneys needing a transcript can order one through a private business called NEXCO in Royal Oak. The transcriber obtains a copy of the videotape from Judge Lippitt, plugs it in a VCR and activates it with a pedal — same as with a sound tape, Young said.

Attorneys can have their own videotapes of court presentations by either 1) providing Lippitt's clerk a blank videotape prior to the hearing or 2) buying a copy of the court's videotape.

ONE "NO-NO" is that "copies of

the tape may not be given to the news media," said Young — at least not yet.

News organizations may request permission to photograph and record Oakland Circuit Court proceedings, but there are a lot of restrictions. The judge can say no, either attorney can say no, the defendant can say no, a witness can say no, the representative of a child witness can say no — and jurors may not be filmed or recorded, period.

Lippitt's equipment shows jurors. In time, Lippitt said, news organizations may be able to watch and record any courtroom from a central point. The official court record thus could become the news reporter's notes.

FIVE CAMERAS activated by eight speakers peer down from Lippitt's second-floor courtroom in Pontiac.

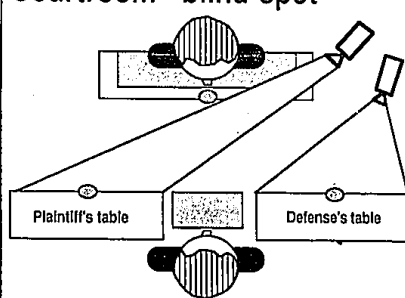
Two cameras behind the judge are focused on the attorneys' tables. Three cameras in the rear of the room show the jury box, the witness box and the judge.

All voices are recorded. The voice of whomever is speaking activates the proper camera.

Why focus a camera on the jury box?

Sometimes prisoners are placed in the jury box for security reasons and can enter a plea from that point, Young said.

## Courtroom "blind-spot"



DAVID FRANK/graphics coordinator

A lawyer using the lectern (below) to address Oakland Circuit Judge Norman Lippitt (top) wasn't clearly picked up by the front video cameras, which are focused on the plaintiff's and defense's tables.

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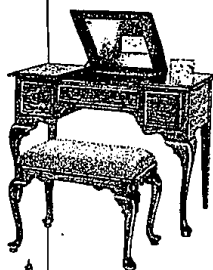
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