

# 2 new circuit judges to cost \$1.3 million

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

A circuit judge's salary — \$92,000 — is only the tip of the iceberg, as Oakland County commissioners are learning.

"The judge's salary is the smallest part of it," said Commissioner Dennis Aaron, D-Oak Park, as the board's general government committee studied a \$1.3 million plan to add two judges in 1990.

And those are only operating costs in 1988 dollars. On top of that, the county board is studying space needs and may wind up investing \$20 million to expand the courthouse.

"I lack enthusiasm for adding judges," said Commissioner Robert Page, R-Birmingham.

BUT HE WAS the only dissenter. The committee gave 5-1 approval to a resolution asking the Michigan Legislature to add two circuit judges to Oakland's contingent of 14.

The proposal will go Friday to the finance committee, which must also approve the plan and factor in the budget costs.

Those other costs — the rest of the iceberg — include clerks, guards, probation staff, Friend of the Court staff, general office staff and prosecutors. (Circuit courts try four criminal cases for every three civil cases.)

The Legislature is looking at its fiscal year right now," said Joan E. Young, circuit court administrator. She urged addition of two judges because "we don't know that in 1990 they'll be in the mood."

She added that "we're looking at" adding two more circuit judges in



Joan E. Young  
delay hurts victims

1992, but that idea isn't firm yet.

YOUNG PERSUADED the panel to ask for two new judges with two arguments:

- Delayed justice is particularly hard on crime victims. "We're now very concerned about victim's rights. I've been to some seminars. The delay is horribly painful psychologically. To care for the rights of victims, we have to speed up the system."

- "Per judge, Oakland circuit judges have the heaviest caseload in the state of Michigan."

Of Michigan's dozen largest circuits, Oakland in 1986 had 1,768 cases filed per judge vs. 916 in Wayne Circuit/Detroit Recorder's courts,

1,496 in Genesee and 1,561 in Kent. Oakland judges try an average of 26,17 cases a year with juries, highest in the top dozen circuits.

But the "backlog" (cases more than two years old) is 50 in Oakland — smaller than Wayne's 263, Macomb's 53, Jackson's 54, Kent's 66 and Ingham's 168, she said.

The growth of crime has increased the burden disproportionately. Young added. While criminal cases are only 21 percent of the docket, 63 percent of the jury trials and 52 percent of non-jury trials are demanded in criminal cases, and trials are running longer.

THE BOARD last week awarded a \$218,000 contract to Minoru Yamazaki, Troy architect, to study space needs and prepare alternate building plans.

When three circuit judges were added in 1978, Young said, the county had to borrow space from the commissioners' offices, a jury room and the economic development office.

"It was makeshift for quite a long time," she said, vowing that good planning would prevent that from happening again.

Page was unimpressed. "The more courts you provide, the more you're gonna need. I don't think we oughta be chargin' down the pike for additional judges," he said.

But the proposal was supported by Republicans Richard Skarratt of Milford, Don Jensen of Birmingham and Roy Rewold of Rochester Hills and Democrats Lillian Jaffe Oaks of Southfield and Ruel McPherson of Hazel Park. Aaron left the room and didn't vote.

## Parks foundation honors pair

A longtime state Department of Natural Resources official and an Oakland County leader will be honored Wednesday, May 4, by the Oakland Parks Foundation at its sixth annual dinner.

O.J. Scherschlight, chief of the DNR's recreation resources division, and Lewis E. Wint, who has chaired the county's parks and recreation commission for 11 years, will be feted in the Addison Oaks park conference center near Oxford.

Ticket information is available from Frances Greenbaum, foundation executive director, at 335-2771.

Scherchlight will be featured speaker. He will discuss trends in state funding of recreation and discuss his recent trip to China as head of the state's panda project.

Wint, director of a Clarkston funeral home, is a founding member and trustee of the foundation.

Long-term goals of the foundation are to raise money for barrier-free

development of Orion Oaks County Park; restoration of a historic milkhouse and Tudor-style home and establishment of a botanical garden at Addison Oaks.

Scheduled for re-election as foundation officers are president George Googasian and secretary Kathryn King, both of Rochester; vice president John Thurber and treasurer Donald Van Loo, both of Birmingham.

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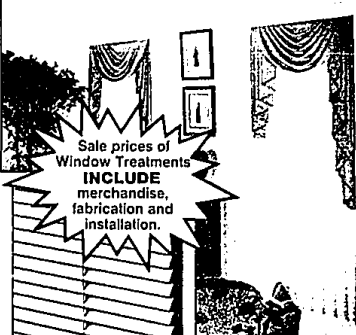
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