

Drain office: Is it politics or engineering?

By Tim Richard
staff writer

William N. Eckstein has only one reason for challenging the boss, drain commissioner George W. Kuhn, in the Aug. 2 Republican primary.

"It's an outmoded form of government," said Eckstein, a civil engineer in the Oakland drain office since 1955.

"Wayne County has eliminated it. There is an adversary role between the drain commissioner and the county executive. The drain commissioner should be subservient to the county executive. It would be cheaper."

"This has been going on for years. The public would be better served by removing this office from politics. This is high-tech Oakland County."

It would take a change in state law to make the job appointive, but Eckstein, unlike Kuhn, would favor the change.

KUHN, SEEKING his fifth four-year term, would move in the oppo-



George W. Kuhn
elect drain chief

Kuhn would bring the executive's public works section under his office, creating the new title of public works commissioner — an elective post.

"Three times the county Board of Commissioners has asked to merge the drain office with public works," Kuhn said.

Each time County Executive Daniel T. Murphy vetoed the resolution, Kuhn said.

The candidates were interviewed recently by a panel of the Oakland Citizens League.

BESIDES HAVING different views on the nature of the job, Kuhn and Eckstein have far different backgrounds and temperaments.

With a degree from Central Michigan and work in Harvard Business School, Kuhn came out of the business end of Ford Motor Co.

As mayor of Berkley and a state senator in the '60s, Kuhn gained fame in an unsuccessful fight against Detroit's city income tax on commuters. As drain commissioner, he has publicly fought Detroit over wa-

ter and sewage treatment rates with some degree of success.

"I'm proud to say we spent 10 years and won many concessions," he said.

KUHN, 63, of Orchard Lake calls the drain office one of the most underrated posts as a governmental tool for economic development.

Talking non-stop, he lists 400 miles of sanitary sewers, three sanitary sewage treatment plants, two new dams, jurisdiction over 29 dams and water level jurisdiction over 44 lakes among his responsibilities.

"We have a very aggressive program of water quality improvement. We have started 30 lake boards. When I was elected, there was one," he said.

"We were designated as enforcing agent for the soil erosion program . . . Now we have power to do a job (in erosion prevention) for a builder and bill him. We can take the bull by the horns."

Kuhn expects a major role in the Rouge River cleanup.

"They want the three counties in-



William N. Eckstein
appoint drain chief

involved in a special drainage district instead of trying to get 48 communities together," he said.

THE OFFICE essentially per-

forms engineering services and shouldn't be political, Eckstein said. A registered professional engineer, Eckstein, 56, of Troy has a degree from the University of Detroit and is a member of the National Society of Professional Engineers.

Kuhn's fights with Detroit Mayor Coleman Young go back to their days in the state Senate, Eckstein said. And when Kuhn talked about \$21 million in savings on water bills from 1977-88, the softer-spoken Eckstein countered, "You never hear about the legal bills."

"Detroit sells the cheapest water in the world," he said.

AS FOR public interest in the post, Eckstein said, "Who cares?"

"Most of it is engineering. That office could function by itself. They don't need any political direction. You have competent people in the drain office. I'm one of 'em."

"You have a politically oriented person at the top. We're like an occupied country in World War II. We (engineers) are still there when the armies come marching through it."

Baskin new head of Oakland Bar

Henry Baskin, partner in the Birmingham law firm of Baskin & Feldstein, is the new president of the 3,000-member Oakland County Bar Association.

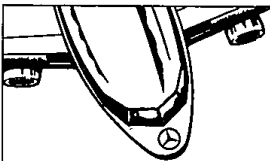
Active in promoting public understanding of law on radio and television, Baskin is an adjunct professor

in the University of Detroit law school and a past president of the Wayne State University Law Alumni Association.

Other officers are: Thomas G. Plunkett, president-elect; Charles F. Clipert, treasurer; and Jeffrey M. Leib, secretary. Elected to the board

was William D. Booth.

District Judge Dennis C. Drury of the 52nd District Court in Troy received the bar's distinguished service award for his "People's Law School" project, which has provided basic legal information to nearly 500 people.



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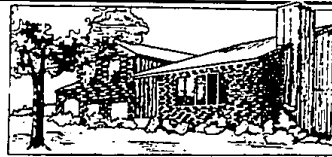
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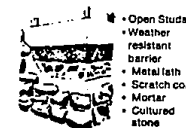
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**"I always expected," Joan Young said,
"that the oldest boy would grow up
and do something terrible."**

"I got a call one night from a local police department that the mother had been jailed for drunk driving. She had the three boys with her in the car. They were five, three, and one. The police wanted me to come and get the kids. Around this same time, the five-year-old killed his puppy."

If you talk with Joan Young, she'll tell you that children are the biggest concern of the Oakland County Probate Court. More than half the court's cases have to do with the well-being of children, with the stability of their lives, with the illegal things some of them do, and with the possibility of their futures.

Joan Young began preparing for the job of probate judge when she started her public service career 19 years ago at

a social worker. She's been a trial lawyer, a family law attorney, and administrator of Oakland County's Circuit Court, Michigan's busiest.

She wants you to think about the children of our communities. She wants you to think about our responsibility to protect those children from abuse and neglect and mistreatment; our responsibility to provide those children with guidance and hope and opportunity. That's so much of what a probate judge's work is all about. And she's ready and prepared to go to work for you.

Put Joan Young to work for you and your family and all the families of Oakland County. Vote for her for Oakland County Probate Judge, Tuesday, August 2.

TAKE A CHILD WITH YOU WHEN YOU GO TO VOTE.

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