

Judges' clerks to be research lawyers

By Tim Richard
Staff writer

Oakland County has entered the bidding war for legal talent to do research for circuit judges. It's upgrading the job and hiking the starting pay 23 percent.

"I got a lot of C-student resumes. We can't have C students," Judge Cunningham, acting court administrator, told the finance committee of the county board.

"I'm on my third research clerk in three years," added Judge Norman Lippitt. "Top firms pay \$50,000 to start, plus bonuses. My clerk may read close to 500 pages. I read bench memos from her."

"I need a top law grad. I can't have a mediocre student. We're not 14 prima donnas who want a lot of assistance. It's not a luxury. It's a necessity," Lippitt said.

THE FINANCE committee hesitated, then finally approved the upgrading 9-0.

Reason for the hesitation was a projected tight budget (see other story this issue). As committee chairman G. William Caddell, R-Walled Lake, summed it up: "I'm having trouble voting for this based on what we have in the pool."

Replied Cunningham: "We are currently paying 70 percent of our costs. We pay for 70 percent of ourselves. How many other departments can say that?"

The upgrading amounts to this:
• Research law clerks will be reclassified to research attorneys, meaning they must be graduates and not just law students.
• Starting salary will be hiked from \$24,599 to \$30,305, same as a beginning assistant prosecutor.
• Two salary steps will be added above the beginning rate.

"WE HAVE difficulty competing with the most minor of law firms," said Judge Fred Mester.

"We'd like them (researchers) to stay longer. It takes time. A prosecutor I (beginner) handles uncomplicated and non-serious cases under su-

pervision," Mester said.

"Our researchers review the senior prosecutors' work," added Cunningham.

Lippitt said the complexity of lawsuits has grown faster than the county's population — citing product liability, condemnation, zoning, mortgage foreclosures.

"We (judges) can't go to the library. We don't have the time," said Judge Hilda Gage.

"There is a growing body of lawyers that want to research law, not practice in front of a judge," said Commissioner James Doyon, D-Madison Heights.

'I'm on my third research clerk in three years. Top firms pay \$50,000 to start, plus bonuses. I need a top law grad. I can't have a mediocre student.'

— Judge Norman Lippitt

DESPITE THE 9-0 approval vote, some finance committee members were less than enthusiastic.

"This won't go with the folks in Leonard," said Richard Wilcox, R-

Orionville, whose district includes the northernmost tier of townships in Oakland County.

"This amounts to a 25-40 percent increase," said Anne Hobart, R-

White Lake, referring to the spread between the current law clerk's base and the third step of a research assistant's pay. "I have a problem with that."

To allay their qualms about revenue sources, Cunningham said the circuit court is generating new revenues, though she couldn't put dollar numbers on them. Among the new sources will be reimbursement from the state for handling escaped prisoner cases, increased guardian ad litem collections, and a 50 percent increase in probation charges (from \$200 a year to \$300) for convicted people.

CUNNINGHAM SAID a move to keep court records on videotape without a stenographer will reduce expenses. The equipment will pay for itself in 1½ years.

"We love it. Judge Lippitt (whose courtroom is conducting the experiment) loves it. Judge Mester wants to request it," said Cunningham.

She added that the court is working on a plan to perform circuit court arraignments by video, so that a prisoner in jail and the judge can face one another on camera, reducing the cost of bringing the prisoner to the courtroom.

ALL PLUS. NO MINUS.

Conference lures authors to Oakland U

If writing is your game — or your goal — there is still time for new and experienced writers to register for Oakland University's 27th Annual Writers' Conference. It's Oct. 14-15 on campus near Rochester.

To register for the conference and its special events, call 370-3120, between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. weekdays, until 5 p.m. Fridays. The conference, co-sponsored by Detroit Women Writers and OU's Division of Continuing Education, is open to the public.

Keynoters for the annual affair include author Elmore (Dutch) Leonard, who will address conferees Friday evening after dinner at Meadow Brook Hall, and novelist-poet Brad Leithauser, who will be guest speaker at the Saturday luncheon in the Oakland Center.

OCC opens series for managers

The second session of a new, non-degree-credit, multicourse curriculum designed to help working professionals prepare for career advancement will begin Oct. 24 at Oakland Community College.

The curriculum was developed by the American Management Association Extension Institute and is offered by the Business and Professional Institute (BPI) of OCC.

Meeting times are 6:30-9:30 p.m. at the Southfield Campus, 23322 Rutland Drive, north of Nine Mile between Greenfield Road and the Southfield Freeway.

The \$175 fee for each class includes textbooks and all materials.

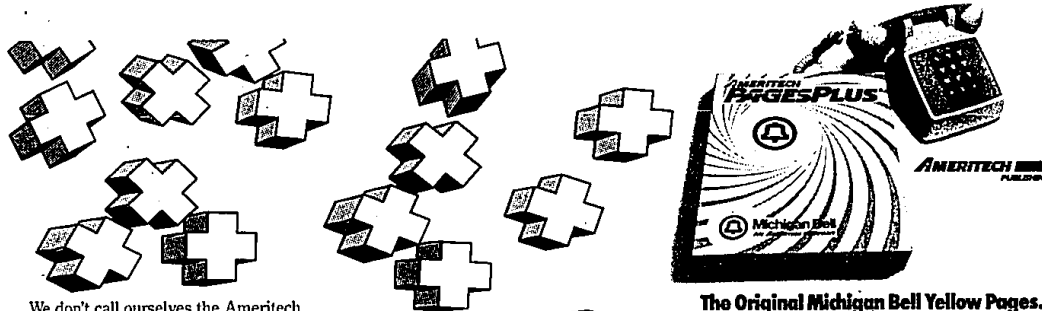
The schedule:
• Communication Skills for Managers, Mondays, Oct. 24-Nov. 28;
• How to Deliver Winning Presentations, Tuesdays, Oct. 25-Nov. 28;
• Managing and Resolving Conflict, Wednesdays, Oct. 26-Dec. 7;
• Success Through Assertiveness, Thursdays, Oct. 27-Dec. 8.
Additional classes will be offered later.

Students may earn an AMA certificate in management upon successful completion of six classes. There is no time limit for completion of the classes which may be taken in any order.

In addition to the AMA certificate in management, OCC will award 1.8 continuing education units (CEU) for the completion of each course, with a BPI certificate of completion, if requested.

The classes, taught by instructors with extensive business experience, will emphasize how other professionals handle similar problems.

Registration information and complete details about the certificate in management program may be obtained by phoning the Business and Professional Institute at 540-1891.



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