

# Houston, Sosnick tell lessons from court

## Oakland Circuit Court

Circuit court is a court of general jurisdiction, trying both criminal and major civil cases. The 6th circuit comprises all of Oakland County. Terms are six years. Current salary is \$92,000. Winner will succeed Judge James Thorburn, who is retiring. You may vote for one. Three other judges are unopposed for re-election: David F. Breck, Alice L. Gilbert and Francis X. O'Brien.

## Robert Houston

By Tim Richard  
staff writer



**name:** Robert Houston  
**age:** 50  
**residence:** Huntington Woods  
**occupation:** administrative law judge, state Department of Social Services  
**education:** M.B.A., Michigan State University; J.D., Detroit College of Law; Wayne State University labor law studies; associate degree, Phoenix College.  
**background:** director, Office of Children Services; legal responsibilities, Civil Rights Commission; staff attorney, Michigan Consolidated Gas Co.; counselor, Boys Republic; State Bar, Wolverine Bar, NAACP.

AS CIRCUIT Judge, Houston said he would bring "a unique input — a minority in a majority-controlled society."

In his view, the Oakland court bench is a "Good Ol' Boys Club run rampant." On the circuit and probate benches, he sees four women and no blacks among 18 judges. "President Reagan has appointed 263 federal judges of whom six are black, 1.7 percent, and 27 are women, 9.2 percent. That sends a message. That sends a message about the system."

Blacks, he said, "have a feeling they're not getting a fair shake and are getting a stacked deal (in courts staffed almost entirely by whites). It's a cloud on the system. It dilutes trust in government."

Influenced by "one of those ugly liberals," Harold Norris, a professor at Detroit College of Law, Houston becomes expansive on participatory government — "an educated and involved citizenry aware of its own self-interest."

A "CONSERVATIVE" on crime, Houston said he would be different from other judges.

"I'm not a member of the Good Ol' Boys Club. I'm a product of the community . . . coming from poverty in the South . . . living in the ghetto as a youth."

"If I sat in that meeting (of the 14 circuit judges), I would be an obstacle. They say if you want to get along, you've got to go along. I'm not a go-along person," he said. Specifically, he would address the issues of attorney assignments and fair fees.

He is endorsed by Council 25 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO.

Public bodies endorsing the fee are the cities of Troy, Keego Harbor, Madison Heights and Walled Lake; the villages of Farmington, the Lakes Area, Rochester, Troy and South Oakland, and Michigan Road Builders Association.

League of Women Voters of Birmingham-Bloomfield has endorsed the \$25 motor vehicle fee proposal for county roads.

If approved, the fee will raise an estimated \$20 million annually for 10 years for use on local roads.

O&E managing director John L. Grubbs said private sector endorsements have come from the Birmingham-Bloomfield and North Oakland Boards of Realtors. Coalition on Road Enhancement (CORE) based in Troy, chambers of commerce of Farmington, the Lakes Area, Rochester, Troy and South Oakland, and Michigan Road Builders Association.

Public bodies endorsing the fee are the cities of Troy, Keego Harbor, Madison Heights and Walled Lake; the villages of Farmington and Holly; and the townships of West Bloomfield, Brandon and Independence.

## Edward Sosnick

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

EDWARD Sosnick does a lot of teaching — high school students, civic groups, other lawyers. "People like to understand how a judge makes a decision," said the 48th District Court judge.

Sosnick, now running for circuit judge, uses his own cases to make the point that you have to assemble all the facts, then go to the law books.

In one of his examples, a mother gave her son an engagement ring to give to his prospective bride. "But the fiancée says the son is a bum who took drugs and was physically abusive and raped her," Sosnick recalled. The fiancée broke the engagement but kept the ring. The mother sued the young woman for its return. "When the mother gave the ring," Sosnick said, "it was conditional. So I had her (the fiancée) give the ring back."

HIS MOST famous case was his first as a district judge four years ago, and it made him famous.

King Boots was an Old English sheepdog, a champion of the show ring. He bit the elderly mother of one of his owners, a woman the couple had cared for for 20 years. The woman died, and the county prosecuted.



**name:** Edward Sosnick  
**age:** 47  
**home:** Bloomfield Hills  
**occupation:** judge, 48th District Court  
**education:** JD, 1967, BA, 1963, Wayne State University  
**background:** chief trial lawyer, Oakland County prosecutor's office; private law practice; board of directors, Haven; advisory board, Common Ground; instructor for Michigan Judicial Institute and Oakland County Bar Association; Lions Club

"The other side (defense) brought in a pathologist with the theory that she had had a heart attack and fallen on the dog. The defense wanted me to adopt the standard of 'vicious habit.' That doesn't mean the junkyard dog."

Sosnick determined the dog had bitten — but only once — and had bitten previously.

He called the case "a good example of the adversarial system. The truth emerges from both sides bringing in all the facts and tearing down the other side's facts."

Sosnick decided against destroying King Boots but did order him neutered, so his traits couldn't be passed on; his canine teeth be removed; and close confinement at home. (The dog died months later.)

The child paid him the ultimate compliment in her court testimony. Asked to identify various people, she said, "You're Ed. You're my friend."

"For some reason," said the burlly Sosnick, "kids are never afraid of me. You don't have to be afraid of a judge or a court. Courts are for people."

"I WANT to be a wise judge. They'll say 'He really listened, tried to understand.' They may not like a decision . . . To me it's a gift."

The best judge he ever practiced before was former circuit judge William Hampton. "He could have been a judge at the age of 8. He never shrank. He listened. He made his decision. He was always prepared, and he had a judicial temperament," Sosnick said.

"If I'm elected, I'd like to treat divorces as the serious matter they are. We intervene where people have substance abuse problems. I'd like to develop mandatory workshops for parents going through a divorce (so they could learn the effect on kids, and so kids don't become pawns — teach them how to be a non-custodial parent; how to talk to a kid on the telephone. I understand two or three states do it.)"

SOSNICK is endorsed by both political parties in Oakland County, 13 of the 14 circuit judges, the Oakland County District Judges Association, the Michigan Legislative Council for the Handicapped, UAW region 1-B, the Michigan Education Association, AFSCME, the Police Officers Association of Michigan, Prosecutors Brooks Patterson, Sheriff John Nichols, the Michigan Trial Lawyers Association and the Women's Bar Association.

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## Ballot proposals are endorsed

The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission is endorsing state Proposals C and D on the Nov. 8 ballot.

"The passage of these proposals can make a much-needed impact on the improving precious natural resources of the entire state by upgrading existing recreational facilities and developing new projects for all," said Lewis E. Wint, chairman of the panel.

Proposal C is a \$660 million bond issue for cleanup of toxic wastes, improving land and water resources, and protecting the Great Lakes.

Proposal D is a \$140 million bond issue for recreation improvements. About half the money will go to local units for public recreation and must provide 25 percent matching investments.

THE OAKLAND County Road Commission announced that the