

'Law clerks' becoming 'research attorneys'

By Tim Richard
staff writer

They were hired as "law clerks," but today they may get the title of "research attorneys" and pay raises of 25-48 percent.

The Oakland County Board of Commissioners is weighing a proposal from circuit judges that their law clerks' titles and salaries be upgraded to keep the county competitive in the marketplace.

"We're getting applications from a lot of C students," said Judge Cunningham, circuit court administrator. "We want to avoid the yearly turnover," she told the county board's finance committee last week. "I look at the market. We're a market economy," said Judge Fred Mester, staring hard at the panel's

'We cannot attract quality people at \$25,000 to \$28,000,' said judge-designate Barry Howard. But the personnel office calls the 25-43 percent pay raises 'a windfall.'

Republican members.

THE COMMITTEE gave 7-3 approval to a resolution that will change 14 persons from law clerks at a flat \$25,570 a year to research attorneys starting at a base of \$31,532 and going up to \$36,393 the third year.

"A windfall," said Vincent Lutz, the county's personnel director, who proposed a more modest set of increases.

"There is a fairly constant turn-

over in the classification, and incumbents are not necessarily expected to remain long. . . . The average tenure currently is approximately two years," Lutz said in a memo. The raises will cost a total of \$186,000, which will come out of the contingency fund.

A MAJORITY of the 14 circuit judges packed the committee room to argue for the higher rates.

"A law clerk is paid less than an assistant prosecutor I, which handles

simple misdemeanor cases," said Cunningham. "A research law attorney handles major liability, environmental, malpractice and murder cases."

She said Oakland since 1979 has handled a rising caseload with 14 judges, who need competent legal help.

"We're a major commercial center of the Midwest," said Mester.

"Every day I hold my breath," said Chief Judge Robert C. Anderson, whose clerk was a registered nurse before law school and knows the medical malpractice field.

"We cannot attract quality people at \$25,000 to \$28,000," said Barry Howard, Birmingham attorney who has been appointed to the bench by Gov. James J. Blanchard.

"You can call law firms and find they're not offering \$25,000 to \$28,000," added Commissioner Don Bishop, R-Rochester, an attorney.

"I've had three (clerks) in the last

year," said Judge Gene Schnetz, complaining of the turnover. Cunningham said former Judge Norman Lippitt had five clerks in his three years on the bench.

THE COMMISSIONERS voted against the increase in committee — Marilyn Gossling, R-Bloomfield Hills, and Larry Drake, R-Waterford.

Gossling noted that the state doesn't pay full court costs in Oakland and 81 outstate counties as it does in better-paid Wayne County. She said other county employees may be resentful at seeing law clerks get such big raises. "The executive's proposal is a compromise," Gossling said.

"I'm a conservative," replied Judge Richard Kuhn. "I don't believe in big spending. But we'd just like to have parity with the prosecutors — \$5,000 more. We'll take (for research attorneys) what you're paying the lowest prosecutor."

'Sleep-out' to fund shelter for homeless

Oakland Community College students and staff will participate in an overnight "Sleep-Out" Friday, Feb. 24, on the Orchard Ridge Campus to raise money for the homeless. The Orchard Ridge Campus is at 27055 Orchard Lake Road, Farmington Hills, near the intersection of I-696.

The sleep-out begins at 7 p.m. in staff parking lot No. 2 near the Orchard Lake Road entrance of the

campus and concludes at 6 a.m. Saturday.

Donations or pledges earned by participants for each hour of braving the weather will be given to the South Oakland Shelter for the Homeless.

Donations may be made to participants in-person at the sleep-out site the night of Feb. 24 or by calling the campus Student Government Office at 471-7763.

Bedding gifts aid homeless

Senior citizens collected 35 blankets and four sleeping bags for the homeless, according to Randy Block of the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency.

The bedding was donated to the

Salvation Army earlier this month — the first installment of a winter-long campaign to aid shelters for the homeless in Oakland.

Block said contributors may call OLHSA at 399-2013.

Realtors, lawyers set up 'crossfire'

The Oakland Bar Real Estate Committee, in conjunction with the Oakland County Boards of Realtors, has announced plans for its sixth annual attorney-broker crossfire and mixer. It will be held 7-10 p.m. Thursday, March 9, in the Michigan Inn ballroom, 16400 J.L. Hudson

Drive, Southfield.

Residential and commercial vignettes on "Disclosure of Material Facts," "Environmental Issues/Earnest Money Problems" and "Agency Disclosure" are planned.

Circuit Judge Gene Schnetz will

moderate the program.

Speaking on behalf of the attorneys will be Janet L. Kinzinger, Philip R. Seaver and Jack D. Shumante. Speaking for the real estate people will be Dennis P. Dickstein of Ralph Manuel Associates, Central, Inc., John J. Halber of RE/MAX West,

Inc., and Delois Kirkland from Real Estate One.

Fees are \$8 if pre-registered, and \$10 at the door. Complimentary refreshments will be served. Cash bar is available. For ticket information, call the OCBA at 338-2100 or 398-3937.

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- Emerson double pillow back, sheared front, 3-pc. sectional, brown or beige was \$5,990.00, now \$2,995.00
- Odd 2-pc. "J" sectional in taupe was \$2,700.00, now \$968.00
- Vassily armchair, grey leather & chrome was \$345.00, now \$195.00
- Arm chair, chrome & tan leather was \$205.00, now \$97.00

Dinettes

- Gorman's Own butcher block rectangle table was \$379.00, now \$155.00

- Matching "ice cream" chairs with cane seats were \$130.00, now \$65.00 each

Bedding

- Simmons "Sleep King" twin set was \$279.00, now \$139.00 set
- Simmons "Maxipedic" adjustable bed, queen size was \$2,495.00, now \$1,333.00

Sofa Beds

- Gorman's Own, queen size, blue with contrast pillows was \$979.00, now \$589.00
- Simmons, queen size, blue & grey durable fabric was \$1,280.00, now \$640.00

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