

Court security

Expansion plans prompt examination of issue

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Oakland Circuit Courts have been lucky... up to now, that is. "We've never had a serious incident," said Judge Robert C. Anderson, former chief judge of the Oakland Circuit Court. "But there's always the possibility."

Anderson said there is a growing concern among judges, attorneys and county employees about security at the main court building at 1200 N. Telegraph Road.

But while most court officers agree that security should be tightened, there is no agreement on how far or by what means.

"Nobody wants an armed camp," said Anderson. "Oakland still wants

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Oakland still wants to be a people's court, where the public feels welcome.'

— Judge Robert C. Anderson

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Some other courts, including Detroit Recorder's Court, have installed metal detectors and otherwise stepped up security measures.

But Oakland Circuit Court has a rather relaxed atmosphere, with people — friends, family members

and associates of the parties involved — generally free to come and go.

"NOBODY HAS any real concern about the defendants," Anderson said, referring to the accused in a criminal case. "Because they are often brought over from the jail and we know they don't have any weapons."

"But we don't know about people in the audience. They could easily cause trouble. Even now, we have people slugging each other and near-

lights on a frequent basis.

"The biggest potential for violence is during domestic matters," he said. "Particularly during custody proceedings in divorce cases."

The topic of tighter court security has been discussed recently because the county is currently reviewing plans for a new courthouse.

"Now is the time to talk about it," Anderson said.

County commissioner Nancy McConnell, R-Bloomfield Hills, agrees. Commissioners will listen to any "reasonable proposal," said the vice chairman of the Board of Commissioners, particularly when the new building is still on the drawing board.

"But so far, nobody has come to us with anything," she said. "We have nothing before us."

McConnell predicts commissioners would be receptive, "particularly if we could eliminate potential problems and insurance liability."

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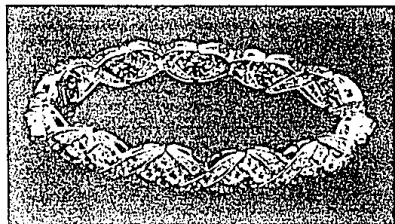
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