

Oakland bar to screen judicial candidates

By Pat Murphy
Staff writer

Would be judges will get closer scrutiny from their brethren under a committee formed by the Oakland County Bar.

The "Public Advisory Committee on Judicial Candidates," has been established to evaluate and rate judicial candidates, said William VanderKloot, one of two Birmingham lawyers who are cochairpersons of the panel. The other is Hanley Gurwin.

The committee is expected to have its hands full, according to the Elections Bureau of the Michigan Department of State.

Oakland voters this fall will cast ballots in three races for the Michigan Court of Appeals, seven circuit judges and as many as 15 district

Judges.

In one court of appeals race, two circuit court contests and at least two district court races, there will be no incumbents, according to the elections bureau.

The absence of an incumbent usually attracts more candidates and generally assures more hotly contested races.

"Experience tells us it is difficult, if not impossible to knock off an incumbent judge," said Gurwin.

IN OAKLAND'S CIRCUIT judge races, for example, at least four lawyers have announced they are running for the two new judgeships. Others are rumored to be evaluating their chances.

Announcing, so far, are State Sen. Rudy Nichols, Troy District Judge Dennis Drury, Rochester Hills District Judge James Sheehy and Thom-

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as Brennan, a Troy resident who is a member of a Shelby Township law firm.

In contrast, no candidates have announced for the five judgeships in which incumbents are expected to seek re-election.

Circuit judges up for re-election are Robert L. Tomplin, Steven N. Andrews, Gene Schmetz, Fred M. Moser and Barry L. Howard.

Only Tomplin has filed for re-election. He did so last Friday.

Other incumbents have until April 9 to file for re-election. Challengers currently have until June 5 to file nominating petitions, although the

state Legislature is talking about moving that deadline up to May 15.

Oakland is part of the Second Circuit of the Michigan Court of Appeals, which includes Ogemaw, Gladwin, Arenac, Bay, Midland, Huron, Tuscola, Sanilac, Shiawassee, Genesee, Lapeer, St. Clair, Ingham and Macomb counties.

Within that circuit, incumbents Kathy Jansen and John H. Shepherd are expected to seek re-election.

The seat of incumbent Walter P. Cynar, who is not seeking re-election, is expected to attract the most attention.

District courts in Hazel Park,

Royal Oak, Berkley, Oak Park, Southfield, Farmington, Birmingham, Pontiac, Drayton Plains, Walled Lake, Clarkston, Rochester and Troy have judgeships up for election.

"Our committee will be very active in these elections," said VanderKloot, who said it will evaluate only candidates running in contested elections.

"We will send out questionnaires, conduct interviews and generally evaluate each candidate (in contested races)," he said.

In previous elections, the Oakland bar polled its more than 3,300 members for their preference.

THE BAR FORMED its committee because it wanted to have more impact on judicial elections, explained Gurwin.

The committee will have six possi-

ble recommendations:

- Outstanding.
- Well qualified.
- Qualified.
- Qualified, but not recommended.
- Qualified, but not experienced.
- Not qualified.

The committee has 50 members including five nonlawyers. "They were selected to assure a wide range of input," VanderKloot explained. "We wanted our committee to be something besides the 'old boys network.'"

Nonlawyers on the committee are Mel Farr, auto dealer; Gordon H. Houtman, president of ABC Warehouse Inc.; Christine Meyers, a partner in Laine Meyers Publisher Representatives, Inc.; Rosalind Griffin, psychiatrist; and Alan Frank, vice president and general manager of WHYY-TV.

Moving to another country?

The Oakland Community College Women's Center will sponsor an informal discussion on the problems and issues women encounter when relocating from one country to another.

The discussion, part of the Multicultural Women's Network, will be

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There is no charge. Call 471-7602 to register.

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