

# Open seats spark intense campaign

ELECTION



## CIRCUIT COURT

See editorial endorsement on Opinion Page.

By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

It's been a long and often hectic campaign for the four candidates vying for the two new circuit court judgeships in Oakland County.

First there was the matter of get-

ting enough signatures (at least 5,000) on nominating petitions by mid-May. Then there was the matter of the August primary when the field of six was trimmed to four.

Since the August primary, the four candidates have been immersed in a flurry of campaign appearances ranging from exhaustive interviews with the Michigan Trial Lawyers Association to "grip and grin" sessions

at the shopping malls.

Most of the candidates say they'd rather work with smaller crowds, where they could have more meaningful discussions about qualifications or the legal system. But trying to reach the county's nearly 750,000 voters means getting out and about — quickly.

**VOTERS WILL** actually elect seven Oakland circuit court judges on

Nov. 6 on the non-partisan ballot. Five incumbents are running unopposed for six-year terms. They are Steven N. Andrews, Barry L. Howard, Fred M. Mester, Gene Schnetz and Robert L. Templin.

But public attention has been focused on the two new positions sought by Thomas M. Brennan, Rudy Nichols, James P. Sheehy and Deborah Tyner.

The top vote-getter among the newcomers will get a 10-year term, while the runner-up wins a 6-year stint. Annual salary is \$98,001.

The new judgeships were created because of the heavy caseload in Oakland circuit court. Two other circuit judgeships will be created in 1992.

Voters still have a likely chance of meeting the candidates in person.

Each has a full schedule of public appearances. Furthermore, cable television is rebroadcasting interviews sponsored by the League of Women Voters and the Oakland County Bar Association.

The following is a brief look at the candidates and some of their thoughts as the campaign draws to an end.

## Thomas Brennan

As vote totals came in from the primary election in August, Tom Brennan did something characteristic, according to campaign coordinator Charles E. Carmody. "He went to bed."

Tally sheets would later show him finishing strong — second in a six-way race. But at that juncture he could do nothing to help or hinder his chances, so Brennan went to bed.

He did the same thing in 1988, Carmody said, referring to the time Brennan ran for probate judge and narrowly lost to Joan E. Young.

"That's typical of Tom Brennan," said Carmody, who is also his partner in their Utica law firm, "low key and folksy."



Indeed Brennan has run what can be considered a "low key" campaign with the usual emphasis on rubber-chicken luncheons and grip-and-grin

Name: Thomas M. Brennan  
Age: 44  
Current position: General practitioner/partner, Brennan, Matranga, Cross & Carmody, Utica  
Education: B.A. John Carroll University (Ohio), J.D., Detroit College of Law  
Hometown: Troy

steps at veterans organizations and retirement communities.

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## Rudy Nichols

Rudy Nichols' spirits have turned around since the Aug. 7 primary election.

"I was a little down because of my showing," said the state senator from Waterford, referring to his fourth-place finish in a six-way campaign. "But things are different now."

Nichols spent eight years in the Michigan Legislature before deciding to run for Oakland County Circuit Court. With his political background — and same identification with voters — he expected to do better.

"I should have known better," Nichols said. "A primary election is totally different than the general. Only



Name: Rudy J. Nichols  
Age: 45  
Current position: State senator  
Education: B.A. Michigan State University; J.D. Detroit College of Law  
Hometown: Waterford

a small percentage of voters get out for a primary (less than 12 percent in the Aug. 7 primary)."

Actually a primary can be a dis-

ortion, he said. Primary results frequently have no connection with the

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## James Sheehy

Lt. Jerry Carlin and Rochester Hills District Judge James Sheehy don't always see eye-to-eye on legal matters.

As a matter of fact, Sheehy has occasionally dismissed cases brought to court by Carlin and other deputies from the Rochester Hills contingent of the Oakland County Sheriff's Department.

Yet Carlin is one of Sheehy's biggest fans.

"If I or anyone in my family was in trouble with the law," said Carlin, "I'd want to appear before Judge Sheehy. He's tough, but fair."

Sheehy has received similar support from various quarters since the campaign started. He's been endorsed by numerous newspapers — and he's received the highest ratings from organizations like the Oakland County Bar Association.

Asked which endorsement carried the most weight, Sheehy paused. "They're all important and I appreciate each one."

Yet endorsements from two organizations — Civic Searchlight of the Oakland County Citizens League and the Women's Bar Association — stood out, he said.



Name: James P. Sheehy  
Age: 47  
Current position: Judge of the 52/3rd District Court, Rochester  
Education: B.S., University of Detroit; J.D., University of Detroit Law School  
Hometown: Rochester Hills

"ONE IS THE oldest organization in the area that evaluates candidates," Sheehy said, referring to Civic Searchlight which rated him "Preferred and well qualified," the organization's highest ranking. (Searchlight rated Rudy Nichols "well qualified" and both Thomas Brennan and Deborah Tyner as "qualified.")

The Women's Bar Association, the Oakland County Region of the Women's

on Lawyers Association of Michigan, has about 300 members. It endorsed one candidate, Sheehy.

Sheehy said he enjoys campaigning, even though it's time consuming and takes away from family and personal life. "I've been very en-

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## Deborah Tyner

At least one area judge believes Deborah Tyner can deliver on her campaign pledge of "Tough Justice." "She might be diminutive (5 feet, 2 inches and 107 pounds) but she can be tough," said Wayne Circuit Judge David P. Kerwin.

Kerwin said he got to know Tyner in the early 1980s when he was on the Detroit Records Court and she was a Wayne County assistant prosecutor. "She was by far the best assistant prosecutor I saw during my 12 years on the bench."

Another circuit judge had similar praise for Tyner. "I know her and her husband," said Oakland Circuit Judge Barry L. Howard, who has endorsed Tyner. "I have a high regard for her legal ability."

Endorsements are an important part of the campaign, admits Tyner, because some voters rely on them.

"But this has been pretty much a campaign of personal appearances," she said. "It's been a hectic six months. The key to this campaign is meeting as many people as possible."

TYNER SAID she enjoys meeting people, but would prefer spending more time with individual voters in a meaningful discussion. "People definitely want to know your background and qualifications."

She and other candidates cannot answer specific questions — like "Where do you stand on the death penalty?" — because to do so could subject them to accusations of bias and lead to their disqualification from a case.



Name: Deborah Tyner  
Age: 34  
Current position: Partner, Sommer, Schwartz, Silver & Schwartz, Southfield  
Education: B.A., University of Michigan; J.D., Wayne State University  
Hometown: Franklin

"Once that's explained," Tyner said, "people seem to understand. But then they want to know about you as a person... What are your

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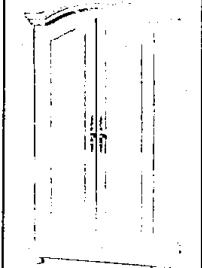
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