

Running for judge

Parker faces McDonald

First of two parts

BY CASEY HANS
STAFF WRITER

When Marla Parker decided to run for office, she took the challenge literally.

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With the November general election just weeks away, the judicial candidate for Farmington's 47th District court is trying to cover as much ground as she can by doing tennis shoes and running from house to house in a quest to win votes.

With the help of volunteers, Parker can be found knocking on doors in the Farmington community seven days a week. "I'm having a great time," she said. "People are friendly and they seem to know who I am. They're asking really good questions."

Attorneys like Tamara Gorosh and John Obee and other friends including Marilyn Smari can be found stumping for Parker on various neighborhood blocks. "Marla's really doing a good job — she's really out there meeting people," said Gorosh who was helping Parker one evening last week along Chesterbrook in Farmington Hills.

Parker, 37, appears to be running as heated a campaign as she did in the primary against six other candidates when she came in second place, earning a chance to run in the November general election against fellow Farmington Hills attorney John "Jack" McDonald, who was the top vote-getter in August. To earn that spot, she spent more than \$60,000 and will likely dole out top dollar in the upcoming election, though Parker has offered no specific spending figures.

Parker told the Observer last February she would not run against McDonald — an associate with whom she formerly shared

office space — but later changed her mind. She formed her election committee in late August and filed for office in May.

With the campaign, the average day runs from sun-up to sun-down, but she said she has little time to think about all the hours. "Sometimes you're tired at the end of the day," she said. "But I know the way to win is to work hard — and I'm working hard."

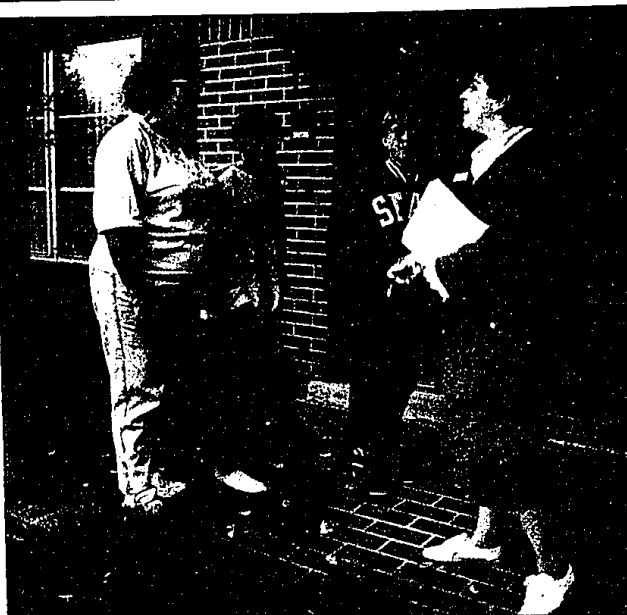
Parker is a sole practitioner in Farmington Hills, where her general practice focuses mainly on family law and criminal work. She also is one of three magistrates serving in the 47th District Court, where she hears routine traffic and misdemeanor cases, approves warrants and arraigns on many criminal matters. The three magistrates rotate duties so one is on call during all non-court hours to handle emergencies. She was appointed to the court post in 1989.

During a regular day on the bench last week, Parker handled a full docket of traffic offenses, arraigned a young woman on felony shoplifting charges and heard testimony from about a dozen witnesses in the case of a young boy who had been hit by a driver in a Farmington traffic accident.

Parker usually calls people to the bench for quiet testimony in the magistrate's hearing room. "I find that people are nervous — many of them are in court for the first time," he said. "I purposely hold hearings right at the bench in a conversational tone. The people are more comfortable and things go much more smoothly."

Married with one child, Parker said the day-after-day campaigning couldn't be done without the support of her family. Their family worked hard when her husband started his own business a couple of years ago, and they are working hard on this, she said. "We sacrificed everything to get him going. He said 'you did it for me — now it's my turn.'"

She believes her 12 years of experience practicing law, her three years serving as magistrate and



STAFF PHOTOS BY JOHN STORMEAND

Hearing her out: Diane Masters (left) and her sons Eric and Kevin listen to Parker, candidate for a judgeship in the 47th District Court.

her overall experience dealing with people makes her the best person for the non-partisan, six-year term on the local bench. Her service, specifically in the 47th District Court, offers a "unique position to assess and evaluate how the court works and where it doesn't work," she said.

"I think my experience on the bench has prepared me for the judgeship," Parker said early in her campaign. "I've experienced that. It's a different way of looking at cases — your job is to make the system work."

"I frankly think I have the temperament for the job. And, of course, I feel that I have the legal knowledge."

Parker has lived in the 47th District for six years and currently resides on the north side of Farmington Hills. She holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Michigan and earned her law degree from Wayne State University.

Much of her community activity has been through legal groups including Oakland/Livingston Legal Aid, for which she is presi-

dent of the board, and the Oakland County Bar Association of which she is also a board member. Locally, she is a member of the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce, the Optimist Club of Farmington/Farmington Hills and recently served on the board of her subdivision homeowner's group in Heritage Hills. She also served on the public safety task force for the Farmington Hills Year 2000 project.

Next: A look at the other 47th District Court candidate, John "Jack" McDonald.

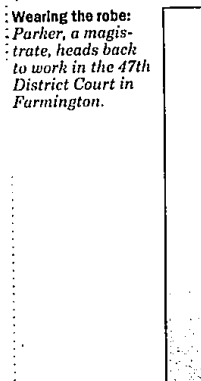


Stepping up campaign: Parker literally runs between houses in a Farmington Hills subdivision Thursday afternoon.



Lacing them on: After a day in court, Parker puts on special footwear for the campaign.

Wearing the robe: Parker, a magistrate, heads back to work in the 47th District Court in Farmington.



Judicial race from page 1A

The 47th District Court encompasses the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills and is located in Farmington on 10 Mile Road.

Several candidate forums have been scheduled by local groups to focus on the race:

■ A forum is scheduled for Tuesday, Oct. 13, by the League of Women Voters-Oakland Area. The half-hour show will be broadcast live on Channel 12 beginning at 7:30 p.m. with viewers able to call in questions at 473-7265. The show also will be taped and re-broadcast before the election. A half-hour segment on the state House race will air the same night at 7 p.m.

■ A second forum, sponsored by the Farmington Observer, has been scheduled for 7 p.m. Monday, Oct. 19, at the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission, 24021 Research Dr., Farmington Hills. The half-hour program will not be shown live, but will be taped for future broadcast on Channel 12.

■ A third forum is slated to be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday evening, Oct. 20, by the Council of Homeowners of Farmington Hills at Farmington Hills City Hall. No further details about this program were available.

McDonald is leaning on his 22 years of experience as a trial attorney in the race. "My experience, background, record of community service and endorsements make me the most qualified candidate," he said, adding that he holds both prosecutorial and defense experience. He also notes that he received the highest rating from Civic Searchlight, a committee of the Oakland County Bar Association.

McDonald, 66, served as an Oakland County Commissioner for 14 years, was an assistant Oakland County Prosecutor and chaired the local Year 2000 project in Farmington Hills. He has been in private practice in Farmington Hills for 19 years.

Parker, 37, has been in practice for 12 years and is currently one of three magistrates in the 47th

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District Court — something she believes is a strength. "An attorney must serve as advocate for a client, taking a side to the exclusion of all other points of view," she said. "A magistrate — as a judge — must draw on skills beyond advocacy, rapidly absorbing testimony and evidence, analyzing the facts and applying the law without prejudice or favor."

She said working directly in the court is also a plus, allowing her to be involved with the court's operation and its staff.

Both candidates propose ways to reduce the court's docket.

McDonald said a judge should be more involved with attorneys at pre-trial conferences so cases can be effectively settled. He also proposes a firm policy on adjournments and better scheduling so the backlog of cases does not grow. McDonald also suggests evening sessions to handle small claims, civil infraction hearings and landlord-tenant cases.

Parker proposes a possible weekend court, with flextime for staff. She also seeks alternative dispute resolution, including using an outside service which can handle disputes between neighbors, for example.

The court is the third largest in Oakland County. In 1991, the 47th District Court handled 38,300 cases, up from 22,399 handled in 1983.



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