

POINTS OF VIEW

A statesman

Murphy worked with all

Dull Dan, some pundits called him — as if government were a comedy show. Daniel T. Murphy's career in Oakland County government, however, was anything but dull. As clerk, chair of the board of auditors and finally for 18 years as county executive, Murphy made county government a premier, effective service agency for people and business.

Murphy didn't shake the rafters with lines like "Give me liberty or give me death." His favorite sayings, not necessarily original, were:

"There's no limit to what you can accomplish if you don't care who gets credit."

"Let's sit down and talk."

"Make things happen."

Presidents and governors took credit for good economic times, but it's significant that Oakland County in the 1980s saw two-thirds of the office growth in the entire state. Oakland is home to more Fortune 500 companies than any other county in Michigan.

His Oakland County Economic Development Group did the job. County offices worked with small villages on downtown plans, with communities bordering I-696 on their turnarounds, and with older cities and townships on the southern border to patch the Eight Mile Boulevard plan.

Murphy was one of a long list of public servants who grasped the notion that no one city dominated Oakland County; that county government could perform, on a cooperative basis, many services that communities couldn't perform as well individually.

Take, for example, the county parks system — an imaginative system of nine parks for day use, camping, golf, water sports and entertainment begun in 1966. No city or township could have done it. No other county has matched it.

In good years and bad, voters renewed their tax commitment.

The self-effacing Murphy would be first to insist that belief in the Oakland ethic is widely held, in both political parties, by many good men and women. But the rest of us would insist that Murphy was the guy who understood how to budget for it and could manage the nuts-and-bolts work that turned concepts into public services.

The cultural affairs office. The Women's Cancer Screening program. The student intern program. The battle for state mental health money. Airport improvements. Public works. And on, and on.

Murphy was the first executive in the state to head a form of government many considered a hydroheaded monster. He plunked for "unified" government, not for reasons of ego, but because he wanted the county to be accountable to the people, not just to courthouse insiders. His battles to bring the Road Commission and the drain office to heel failed politically, but Murphy won the long-term war to get those offices to "sit down and talk... make things happen."

Early in his career, Murphy disdained the area south of Eight Mile. Abruptly he saw the light, took a leadership role in the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, showed more leadership in public transportation, developed a rhetoric-free relationship with Detroit's mayor and worked with leaders of Macomb and Wayne counties.

As he retires to the Lake Michigan shoreline and former prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson prepares to take over, honors are coming Dan Murphy's way:

- The "summit award" from the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce.
- The renaming of the Executive Building in his honor.

We add only one thought. Any portrait, nameplate or sculpture of Mr. Oakland County should bear the Dan Murphy Creed: "Make things happen."

Politics halts judicial reform

Jim Ryan's prediction for 1993 was discouraging. "It's not politically expedient," said the veteran jurist. We were talking about a plan to unify circuit, probate and district courts into a single trial court in Michigan. Every trial judge would handle every kind of case.

The recommendation came two years ago from the Commission on the Courts in the 21st Century. That group was established by a resolution co-sponsored by a senator named John Engler.

Oakland Circuit Judge Barry Howard of West Bloomfield and former judge Robert B. Webster of Birmingham were on it. Wayne County people included Circuit Judge Sam Gardner and the new county clerk, Teola Hunter. Big union people like Ernie Lofton and William C. Marshall signed on.

Ryan is what they call a judge's judge. After graduating from University of Detroit law school and serving in the Navy's judge advocate general corps, he practiced law with a young Livonian named Daniel Burrell, now a Livingston County circuit judge.

At 31, Ryan was elected a justice of the peace in Redford Township under the old 19th century system. He moved up to Wayne circuit judge in 1968 and the Michigan Supreme Court in 1976. Now he is a judge of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, second highest in the land. He teaches at schools for judges. President Reagan made a mistake, in my view, when he bypassed Ryan for William Rehnquist for U.S. chief justice.

So when Ryan said unifying the trial courts "would heighten efficiency," I listened.

"There is no jurisprudential reason for a multiplicity of courts. Our system is extremely inefficient. But there is a political reluctance to put supervisory authority into the Supreme Court."

So why do we continue with a system where Joe Six-Pack doesn't know which court has jurisdiction over an \$11,000 civil suit or why a murderous juvenile is silently swallowed up by a probate court?



TIM RICHARD

Ryan quoted state Justice Charles Levin, "When everybody's in charge, nobody's in charge."

Of the 21st Century Commission's recommendation, Ryan observed, "These proposals have been made in Michigan, not frequently but regularly. The press supports most consolidation plans, but the Legislature rejects them. They (legislators) are made to believe that it's a good thing for district judges to remain close to the people."

Retiring Redford District Judge John Dillon, an old friend and associate of Ryan, favors a unified trial court. "I've sat in Circuit Court many times. Why not? We went to the same law schools and read the same books," Dillon said, adding it would give judges more variety.

So we continue: Circuit courts handle major civil lawsuits and criminal cases, though some Detroit's Recorder's Court and Ingham's Court of Claims get into the act; probate handles wills, adoptions, delinquency, neglect and abuse cases; district courts handle misdemeanors, pre-trial exams in criminal cases and civil cases up to \$10,000, though the circuit court can kick back (remand) larger cases.

No change in the judiciary in 1993. It's starting to sound like the school finance reform story.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events. To leave a voice mail message for him from a touchtone phone, dial 953-2047 mailbox 1881.

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