

Judge from page 1A

10 Mile. That's OK, too. She now has time to sign papers and review the criminal docket. Parker and her collesgue, Judge Fred Harris, alternate weeks of criminal and civil cases.

Parker's court clerk, Katheen Mara, brings in some files and says the prosecutor has a case-ready to go. Court is in session—for one holdover case from the previous week. Then back to chanbers to sign more papers.

"I'll go in session for one or two cases if I can," she says, adding that otherwise they mount up. But although she has the smile of a real trooper and a sense of

■ '1 try to make sure i spend time with my family. That sometimes means working in the middle of the night.'

Judge Parker

humor. Parker is a realist. Chipping away at the docket is no guarate of a smooth session.

With the mixture of 28 cases involving pretrials, sentencings and formal hearings, Parker winds up apending the lunch hour in court, not at the Oakland County Bar meeting ake had planned to attend in Pontiac.

"The bar is actively involved in educating the public about the legal system," ahe says. "Jill try to attend a luncheon meeting. But this (court) comes first." for lunch and asks her clerk and court reporter Carol James to be back in a half hour. Instead of a luncheon in Pontiac, its the drive-

through at McDonalds. She goes over more cases in chambers.
In the late afternoon session, they prosecution witness in a retail fraud case is not in court. Assistant prosecutor Kirsten Nielsen ropers the bad news.

"He said he forgot," she says.
Parker moves on to other matters, asks a police detective to call the man, who is in St. Clair Shores.

The witness makes the drive, testifies and court is adjourned at 530 p.m.

testifies and court is adjourned at Now comes some real judgment. She can stay at court and work for an hour or two and go home to her husband Brad and daughter Jill. Or she can go home and spend time with her family, on the sight and work. I've to make sure I spend time with the ramily, or the sight and work. I've to make sure I spend time with by family," she says. "That sometimes means working in the middle of the night."

And she got through the entire docket. A good day by any measure.

Making a point: Saginaw attorney Thomas Frank argues on behalf of his client in Farmington District Court.

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Courtroom setting: A young woman stands before Judge Parker in a 47th District

Mirror, mirror: Judge Marla Parker takes one last look in the mirror before heading



Courts struggle with tight deadlines, large dockets

Cases pile up, courts say they can't add needed judges and staff and everyone complains that the system is inefficient.

If justice delayed is justice denied, those who are closest to the system are well sware of the law's delayed.

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judges.

But most courts have the same horror stories. Defense attorneys who are late because they have other cases the same morning in other courts; witnesses don't appear, deadlines for cases push other cases of the day's docket and witnesses who just forgot

the court date. And the judge has to make some tough decisions.
"The senior citizens who volunteer to report hand-leapped parking violations do a magnificent job," said Judge Fred Harin. "But they have little or no experience with the court system and they don't understand when a case has to be delayed."

And for many, an adjourned case can mean lost wages or other problems, he said.

Assistant prosecutor Kirsten Nielsen, who is assigned to the 47th District Court, said she has to meet with defense attorneys, discuss the case and often work out pleas before going into the court room.

"I start at 8:30 (a.m.) and meet with defense law-yers up until 11," she said.

And although she sometimes has enough cases to bring before a judge, Nielsen often has to make sev-eral trips back to her office for more conferences. eral trips back to ner official visions who are prompt. If they aren't, you have a nasty ripple effect. "I a judge doesn't take the bench until 10 (a.m.);" a defense attorney won t show up until 11," she said.

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