Sheriff wins battle over contract bids

BY PAT MURPHY

BY PAT MUREIT STATE WATER AND THE PATE WATER THE PATE THE PATE WATER AND THE PATE WATER A can give the contract to anybody he likes."

The dispute between Nichola and commissioners focused on a

The dispute between Nichola and commissioners focused on a contract to serve subpoense, divorce papers, forclosures and other legal documents. Until 1993, when the function was rejuctantly privatized, the papers were served by deputies.

It flared up last month when commissioners challenged some provisions of the contract and worked out a compromise approved by the Finance and Personnel Committee.

The compromise called for rewriting the process serving contract — and awing the county 315,000 a year. But commissioners were unaccessful in trying to persuade, cajole or force the sheriff to explore the possibility of saving even more money by seeking competitive bids.

Nichola didn't appear at Thursday's meeting, and he has repeatedly stated, through his scoretary, that he has nothing more to say about the episode. On previous occasions, howev-

about the episode.

shout the episode.

On previous occasions, however, Nichols has repeatedly reminded commissioners that process serving is a function the sheriff is constitutionally obligated to perform or supervise. He has steadfastly refused to work with any of the professional process servers available and inslated on awarding the contract on a no-bid basis to the person or company of

his choosing.

Nichols holds the trump cards because the process servers must be deputized, and the sheriff said he will not bestow that sutherity on saybody not of his choosing. Commissioner Lawrence R. Pernick, D. Southfield, and others acknowledge that Nichols should be able to select someone he trusts. But the county might save money — and reinforce a preferred policy of competitive bidding — If the sheriff selected five or six people or companies he trusts, and then let them bid for the contract.

Some other counties seek bids, they note, and Oakland could possibly save mency by doing the same thing.

Nichols rejected the idea. Furthermore, an opinion by the Oakland County corporation counsel specifies that processes serving is a professional services contract the sheriff can award without bidding.

That opinion gives the sheriff a

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That opinion gives the sheriff a free hand to proceed with previously announced plans to award the contract to an Oskland Countries and the contract to an Oskland Countries are presented.

ously announced plans to award
the contract to an Oakland County assistant prosecutor.
That assistant prosecutor,
Matthew J. Chodak, is highly
qualified, commissioners agree.
But he is also the son of Joan and
Murray Chodak, close friends of
Nichols who are hosting a \$100
per person birthday bash for Nichols in their Bloomfield Township home on Sept. 10.
Commissioners were engry that
Nichols refused to consider competitive bidding. That anger was
compounded by the sheriff intention to give the contract to the
friend of a fund raiser.
"The purpose of competitive
bidding is to seek the best prices," said commissioner Kingrett.
"But the competitive forces of the
market place are negated because
of the sheriff."
Commissioner Obrecht, however, said the disputs has been an
overall victory for the board of
commissioners. "Sheriff Nichols
didn't want to privatize," he said,
"but we get him to do it, and we
saved money.
"Now, because we renegotiated
the contract, we save another
\$15,000. Maybe nort time — possibly with a new sheriff — we can
get competitive bidding."

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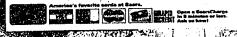
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Technique detects flaw in heart valves

Researchers at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak have used a high-resolution, X-ray imaging technique that may predict failure of a type of heart valve used by 4,000 living patients.

An article in the August 17, 1905 New England Journal of Medicine presents the results of a landmark research study.

"This new detection method may be of considerable holp to physicians and patients in making decisions on removal of the valve," said Dr. William Orbelli, the study's chief investigator and director of Beaumont's Division of Cardiovascular Disease.

"This technique could bring peace of mind to patients with intact, well-functioning valves and give others concrete information to help them weigh the risks of valve failure versus removal.

"Since patients with structurally intact valves do well, and elective removal is associated with a 3-6 percent risk of death, surgical removal of the valves has not been recommended for all patients," O'Neill said.

The study used clearediographic imaging to detect a separation in one of two legs of the outlet strut of a Bjork-Shiley Convescences (CC) heart valve.

Billey Inc. stopped production of the valves in 1986. The research at Beaumont was funded by a grant from the Shiley Heart Velve Research Center in Irvine, Celif.

"alagle-log asparation" is the technique or supplete affect.

Velva Research Center in Irvina, Cailf.

A "aingle-leg asparation" is thought to precede complete strut fracture leading to valve failure. As of Dec. 31, 1994, complete strut fractures had been reported in 594 patients with CC valves, resulting in patients' deaths about two-thirds of the time.

In the research trial at Beaumont, physicians acremed 315 patients with CC valves of a size and type identified through eatilier research as having the highest risk of either failure (22 mm or largor valves implanted in the mitral position with an estimated fracture rate of 0.46 percent or higher per year).

Patients, identified through a national valve registry, were screened at least twice at a sixment interval, or more often if prior screening results looked auspicious.

Of the 315 patients screened at Beaumont from August 1992 to February 1994, 11 patients had valves identified as "definite" or "probable" single-leg separations. Ten of 11 valves were confirmed to have single-leg separations through removal of the valve prior to failure. One valve with a "probable" sating was intact. Two complete outlet strut fractures occurred three and seven months after normal cinoradiographic examinations.

"Although the risk of strut frac-

examinations.

"Although the risk of strut fracture is not entirely eliminated by cineradlographic screening, it can reduce the occurrence and save some lives," said Dr. O'Neill.

"For valve separations to be accurately identified, extensive training in the interpretation images is required. The necessary expertise will be most readily available at regional referral conters," he said.

Between 1979 and 1998, approximately 86,000 Bjork-Shiley CC valves were implanted world-wide. In clinical trials of the de-vice, there was one reported fail-

wide. In clinical trials of the device, there was one reported failure of a valve. Additional audden
failures occurred after the valve
was introduced for general use.
In April 1994, there was a
change in manufacturing and
quality control procedures. No
outlet strut fractures have been
reported in valves welded after
March 31, 1994.

William Beaumont Hospital is a 929-bed tertiary care, teaching, research and referral center that is one of the nation's busiest car-

is one of the nation's busiest car-diology centers.
Further research of the new screening method is currently un-der way at Stanford University in California and the Western Initi-mary in Chagow, Sootland. The technique is not approved for gen-eral use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.