

Circuit judge candidate used to go to work with dad

BY HANDBA ARMSTRONG
OAKLAND COUNTY EDITOR

John N. O'Brien, an Oakland County assistant prosecutor and candidate for Circuit Court, first got interested in the legal field from his late father, who also served as a Circuit Court judge.

"When I was 8- or 9-years-old, my father represented a woman whose husband, in attempt to gain custody of the kids, accused her of beating them," O'Brien said. "My father took photographs of my back and legs because we had scars (from playing). That was my dad's scars couldn't hold a candle to ours."

"He had us come and testify. That's when I first got a taste of the courtroom. I thought it was exciting, to sit in the big chair. I went to court with him every opportunity afterward."

"Our phone number was in the book," O'Brien continued. "My father was available for arrangements at night. He'd come into my room, if school was out, and say 'Do you want to go to court?'"

Later when there were motions or criminal trials — that was a big treat."

In college, O'Brien began to study political science.

"That was easier. It had nothing to do with the law, and I didn't think it would serve me well. So I (earned) a business degree instead in economics. That fit real well with what I had planned."

O'Brien's plans were first law school and then to follow in his father's footsteps, first as a trial attorney. So while at the Detroit College of Law, he immersed himself in the Moot Court Executive Board, he tried trial competitions and took all the litigation courses he could.

He attended law school for five years at night, at one point working as a research lawyer during his third year of school for his father, who by then had become a judge.

"It was the most wonderful year of my life," O'Brien said. Since 1984, he has worked since 1984 as a county law clerk

in civil practice and in the prosecutor's office. Four years ago, O'Brien said he realized his career goal should be to become a trial lawyer.

"I wanted to wait until I had the right opportunity and enough experience. And that was about a year ago."

The retirement of Judge Robert Templein created the open seat. He has passed the maximum age set by law to seek a position as judge.

There's a lot of satisfaction in the legal field, O'Brien said. "You can't buy that feeling. And if you could, they ought to charge a high dollar for it."

The law isn't the only thing O'Brien gets great satisfaction from. Wife Judy and his 10- and 4-year-old boys are high on his list as well.

O'Brien and his wife, who recently celebrated their 14th wedding anniversary, attended the same high school and met at a dance-a-thon.

"We danced all night and into the morning. Four or five

months later we started dating. That was 20 years ago. I've been married to or dating my wife more than half of my life," O'Brien said, laughing. "We're the best of friends."

With the children there is Cub Scouts, soccer and karate school for "time spent just with dad." The fun includes Dad and Lad campouts and family campouts.

There is also time for civic and professional activities, like designing sets for plays at Shrine High School in Royal Oak, teaching Sunday school, working with the Child Abuse and Neglect Council, speaking before neighborhood groups and civic classes, providing educational programs to a police academy and the National College of District Attorneys. He has also taught at Oakland University and Oakland Community College.

The candidate said he can't lose because either way he will "stay in a trial court situation. . . A judge has a responsibility to stay a public servant and with

this I won't be so far from another job I love, being a trial attorney. It was never the lure of the dollar that brought me to the profession. When I was hired as an assistant prosecutor, they asked if I wanted to know how much I would be making. I said it didn't matter because that's what I wanted to do."

Now in the second phase of the campaign, O'Brien said he is "making myself as available as I can", outlining his qualifications, and discussing what a judge does and what happens in the trial courts.



John N. O'Brien

Executive candidate shares political spotlight

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

A last-minute switch has renewed Edward Hamilton's faith in the politics of President Clinton and the value of being a team player.

After some confusion — that could have been a snub or a snafu — Hamilton was again invited to share the political spotlight as part of the welcoming committee for President Clinton's appearance in Pontiac Tuesday.

Hamilton — who is running against county executive L. Brooks Patterson — was reinstated barely 24 hours before Clinton's campaign train was to chug into Pontiac en route to the Democratic convention.

Twenty-four hours earlier, Hamilton said he had been invited to work trial part of the welcoming entourage . . . despite having been invited.

"I didn't know what to think," said the Troy resident. "I didn't know if I'd been dropped in favor of another candidate, or because of a mix-up. But I need the exposure more than he (Clinton) does."

The president, after all, is the incumbent with polls showing him in the lead. Hamilton is a relative unknown trying to unseat the most well-known Republican in southeast Michigan.

Hamilton never anticipated being a major player in Clinton's appearance. But once invited, he expected some minor role in wel-

coming the President.

Hamilton is, after all, at the top of the party's county ticket, and political protocol would seem to dictate some political courtesies.

"Besides, I'm in the same political mold as Clinton," Hamilton said. "He's an unconventional Democrat, and so am I."

Hamilton, 53, is a new vehicle launch manager with the Chrysler Corp. who believes in downsizing government and balancing the budget. He even

believes in term limits.

"It was a wonderful experience," Hamilton said Wednesday. "It was almost surreal seeing the modern Amtrak double-deckers in front and the historic old cars in the back."

Hamilton was accompanied by his wife Silvia and their two children, Adam, 13, and Kyrle, 12. "The kids wanted to go shopping at the mall instead," he said. "But I insisted they see the President. They'll tell their grandchildren about this."

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The efforts almost turned ugly, however, after James M. Hardin and another member of the squad were scooped as they took "Dole-Kemp" signs among the crowd in Royal Oak.

Seeing the signs as an obvious affront to Clinton, some Democrats reacted by moving in front of the unwanted demonstrators, using their "Clinton-

Gore" signs to obscure the "Dole-Kemp" signs.

A few less tolerant members of the crowd were more hostile and vocal. Sometimes standing nose-to-nose and using profanity, they voiced displeasure at the signs and those "Dole-Kemp" Republicans. Hardin and his colleague were undaunted, however. "Free speech," he said. "That's what this country is all about."

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