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# Judge tries to understand case, people

(This is the fourth in a series profiling each of the six candidates running for five seats on the Oakland Circuit Court in the Nov. 5th general election. A 1996

circuit judge's salary is \$109,257. The term is six years. Clipping and saving these stories may help you in your decision-making.)



BY JUDITH DONER BENNE  
 SPECIAL WRITER

It's a frenzied afternoon in Judge Fred M. Mester's courtroom as a slew of

how she shoplifted items worth more than \$100. "It's been a long day and this is an extremely serious matter."

And when he's informed that a young man is serving two consecutive lifetime probation, he cracks: "He's one of the few people in the world that has two lifetimes."

Compassion also comes through. In the case of a prisoner who is obviously suffering from a mental illness, he takes pains to see that he's released to a custodial brother and that the brother knows exactly where to go to get him.

He tells a mother and her daughter, the victim of a criminal sexual assault charge, that he will meet with them in chambers. "I hear 2,000 cases a year."



Fred Mester

But in cases like this, I always see the people involved — to make them understand what's going on and to answer their concerns."

And in a hearing on a substance abuse case in which the accused is making good progress in a treatment program, he relieves her concerns of paying court costs for the time being. "The main thing is we get her better. Good luck to you, Ms. Scott."

"Every case has to be that judge's most important case," Mester explains a couple of days later, when he's asked to detail a memorable case.

He picks an early 1990's conflict between SOCRRA (Southeast Oakland County Resource Recovery Authority) and its Rochester Hills neighbors over the incineration facility that serves 14 communities.

Mester calls it an example of the "continuing conflict we have trying to address environmental problems in an urban society. The people who lived near the site were faced with odor, standing water and mosquitoes. But the 14 communities were also placed in a difficult situation" since the facility predated their homes.

"We worked with Rochester Hills and SOCRRA to resolve it. But the frustration was that both groups were right."

Mester first articulated that he wanted to be a lawyer to his ninth grade civics teacher. That choice may have been fed by the interest his grandfather and father took in political issues. His dad, a Michigan farmer, was always involved in the community, Mester says.

The interest in the law continues in his family as Mester's son David is his senior clerk.

Court can be exciting. But there's also a lot of routine and, according to Mester, sometimes becomes a test of patience. For example, "My patience is being tried" by the attorneys in a case he was dealing with that afternoon. "That happens and judges have to learn to control that

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## CANDIDATE'S BIOGRAPHY

Name: Fred M. Mester. Age: 59. Hometown: Bloomfield Hills. Education: B.A., Central Michigan University (1959); J.D., Wayne State University (1967). Experience: Oakland County Circuit Judge (1982-present); Oakland Circuit Court Administrator/Judicial Assistant (1976-1982); Chief, Civil Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office (1973-1975); Asst. U.S. Attorney (1969-1973); attorney, Chrysler Corp. (1967-69). Judicial/legal leadership: CEO and Board of Directors, William Booth Legal Aid Clinic; Board of Directors, Reading to Reduce Recidivism Program; Federal Bar Association's Earl W. Kintner Award; John N. O'Brien Judicial Servant Award, Past President Federal Bar Association, Detroit. Community contributions: Board of Directors, Royal Oak Boys & Girls Club, South Oakland YMCA and Multiple Sclerosis Society. Family: Married to Lynne Margaret Curtiss Mester; three children, David, 27, Katherine, 25 and Karen, 17.

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