

Potts: Hard work brought success

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Asked for a piece of advice to pass along to young lawyers, Wendy Potts thought for a moment and said, "If you want something, work for it and work hard. It could happen."

Potts, an attorney who works and lives in Birmingham, will bring that philosophy — and a lifetime of experience — to the bench when she is sworn in as Oakland County's newest probate judge, probably next month.

Potts was one of three Oakland County appointments made by Gov. John M. Engler. The governor appointed Circuit Judge Hilda R. Gage to the Michigan Court of Appeals; Probate Judge Joan E. Young to the Oakland Circuit Court; and Potts to the Oakland Probate Court.

For Potts, becoming a judge is the fulfillment of a lifelong ambition. She has been a specialist in family law with Clark Hill, P.L.C., in Birmingham and was a member of the governor's Task Force on Domestic Violence. She is a former clerk to Judge William R. Beasley of the Michigan Court of Appeals.

So many social problems are linked to family life, Potts said when asked about her affinity toward family law.

With that background, Potts said she is very interested in the reorganization of the Oakland Circuit Court, specifically the

formation of a Family Court, scheduled to begin in January 1998.

As outlined by state and local officials, the family court will combine some of the work from both the probate and circuit courts for greater efficiency. Some matters — including child custody issues and domestic violence — are better handled by family court.

Former Oakland Circuit Judge Robert Webster, also with Clark Hill in Birmingham, said he has "a bitter sweet" reaction to his colleague's appointment to probate court. "It's a wonderful move for her," he said. "But we'll miss her. She's very knowledgeable, and she works very hard."

Webster is also cochair of the Judicial Qualifications Committee of the State Bar of Michigan that evaluated Potts, and other judicial candidates, before giving a confidential report to the governor's office.

Engler cited her legal abilities and leadership qualities when he announced Potts' appointment earlier this month, including her involvement in the Oakland County Bar, where she was president in 1994-95.

Potts said her appointment is a professional dream come true. But she also acknowledged it is tempered with reality. "I'm really looking forward to it," she said, "but there's a lot of work ahead . . . including winding down my private practice."

All rise!



Higher Justice: Joan Young (right) received an appointment to Oakland County Circuit Court and Wendy Potts was appointed to Oakland County Probate Court.

Wendy Potts

- Education: Wayne State University Law School, 1977; University of Michigan, 1965; Mumford High School, 1961.

- Professional background: Presently with Clark Hill P.L.C., Birmingham.

- Former partner with Hill Lewis, P.C., Birmingham.

- Associate with Morris, Rowland, Prekel, Paquette, Keidan & White.

Joan E. Young

- Education: Wayne State University Law School, 1974; Michigan State University, 1969; Allegan High School, 1965.

- Professional background: Currently chief judge of the Oakland Probate Court since 1989, was appointed to fill the vacancy created by an earlier Engler appointment. She replaces Hilda R. Gage who is now serving on the Michigan Court of Appeals.

- The circuit court is fortunate, said Young's colleague on the probate bench, Judge Barry M. Grant. "I've worked with her on many issues in the course of our duties, and I have great respect for her temperament and her abilities."

- "She has tremendous ability, and we'll miss her," said Grant. Young hopes to put her background in family and domestic matters to good use in the circuit court and, possibly, the county's new Family Court scheduled to begin operations next January.

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Young's probate skill aids in post

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Joan E. Young started her professional life as a social worker, a job she said helped shape her professional and personal philosophies.

"The work helped me realize the relationship between the legal system and the family," said Young, who earlier this month was appointed by Gov. John M. Engler as the newest Oakland Circuit Court judge.

Young, who has been an Oakland County Probate Court judge since 1989, was appointed to fill the vacancy created by an earlier Engler appointment. She replaces Hilda R. Gage who is now serving on the Michigan Court of Appeals.

"The circuit court is fortunate," said Young's colleague on the probate bench, Judge Barry M. Grant. "I've worked with her on many issues in the course of our duties, and I have great respect for her temperament and her abilities."

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With her professional background, Young would be an asset in Family Court, said Edward Sosnick, presiding judge of the Oakland Circuit Court. "She has

a history of involvement (personal and professional) in family issues."

Sosnick said it is highly likely Young will be one of the six or eight judges — selected from probate and circuit courts — to be selected to family court later this year.

Young has been involved in, and written papers about, a variety of issues. She is director emerita, for example, of HAVEN in Pontiac and a member of the State Consortium on Post Adoption Services of the Michigan Department of Mental Health. From January 1979, until August 1983, she was on the Michigan State (teacher) Tenure Commission, appointed by Gov. William G. Milliken.

One of her most gratifying activities, Young said, was as a member of the committee formed to recommend reorganization of the juvenile code to the Michigan Legislature. Many of those recommendations were incorporated into the juvenile code last fall and earlier this year.

One of the most significant changes, Young said, was providing flexibility to probate judges faced with sentencing youngsters as adults.

Young is married to Tom Sosnick, an attorney and public accountant. They have two children, Katherine and Andrea, and live in Bloomfield Village.

2 share post of vice president at OU campus

Two Oakland University administrators are temporarily sharing the position of associate vice president for academic affairs for the Rochester institution.

The OU Board of Trustees recently approved the appointments of Catherine Rush and Jack Nachman to fill the position held by William Connellan. Connellan is serving as acting vice president for academic affairs this year while the university is undergoing a search for a vice president and provost.

Rush, who was acting employment director/labor advisor, employee relations, is now responsible for faculty labor relations including personnel issues, contract administration and collective bargaining. She will serve in this position until fall 1997, after the faculty contract is negotiated.

Nachman was a mathematics professor temporarily serving as distance learning facilitator, a special assignment from the vice president for academic affairs. Now he will oversee the operation of the Office of Computer and Information Services and the registrar. He also will supervise the administration of Michigan Jobs Commission educational training grants.

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