

2 appointees bring experience to new county court positions

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF REPORTER

The new year will bring exciting challenges for two seasoned Oakland County lawyers.

That's when Wendy Lynn Potts and Linda Saoud Hallmark are expected to take on their new duties as Oakland County judges.

Potts, a probate court judge, will become a circuit court judge, replacing Francis X. O'Brien who retired in September.

Hallmark, who had been a Friend of the Court referee since 1980, will replace Potts as probate court judge.

Both were appointed to their judicial posts by Gov. John M. Engler Thursday (Dec. 11).

"I hadn't submitted my name (for consideration)," said Potts, "and my first inkling that I might be appointed came two days before the appointment was announced."

"I saw the governor in Lansing on Tuesday, and he asked if I was interested. Of course, I said 'yes!'"

Two days later, Potts — who lives in Birmingham with her husband David W. Potts — got the governor's call.

"It's going to be challenging," said Wendy Potts. "I'm looking forward to handling the criminal cases, as well as the civil cases."

This has been a year of surprises for Potts, a 1977 graduate of the Wayne State School of

Law. In February when the governor appointed her as a probate judge in recognition of her background that had been primarily in family law.

Later in the year, Potts was notified of yet another upcoming challenge. When the Oakland courts were reorganized, Potts was named as one of seven judges to the newly created Family Division of the Oakland Circuit Court.

The family division — created to put more judicial emphasis on family matters like divorce cases and custody proceedings — is scheduled to begin functioning Jan. 1.

With her latest appointment, however, Potts will not be part of the Family Division. "I don't consider this to be a setback," she said. "I want to broaden my judicial experience, although I might be interested in the family division in a couple years."

Taking Potts' place as a probate judge assigned to the Family Division will be Hallmark, who as a court referee had performed many of the duties of a probate judge.

Hallmark, also a 1977 graduate of the Wayne State University Law School, also received the governor's call Thursday.

"Actually my husband (Robert, also a lawyer) got the call at his office," she said. She was at a luncheon with her staff, and her husband contacted her.

The conversation with Engler

was brief. She had wanted to be a judge for some time, and it didn't take long to make up her mind.

"It wasn't the only goal in my life," Hallmark said. "But I had submitted my name for consideration, and I did want the job."

In 1990, Hallmark ran for the Michigan Court of Appeals and won her primary. She lost in the general to Tom Fitzgerald.

Hallmark carried Oakland county, but most of the other 10 counties in the judicial region went to her opponent.

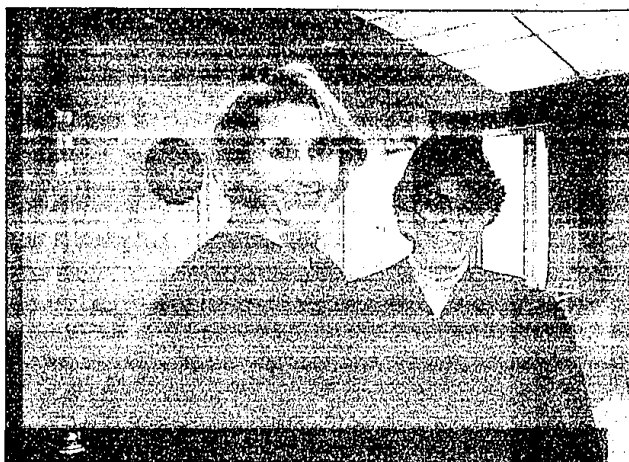
While it's never fun to lose, she said she doesn't regret the experience of a hotly contested election. "I met a lot of great people," said Hallmark, who lives in Bloomfield Hills.

Hallmark also sees challenge in her new position... as well as the potential for accomplishing something important.

The new family division is an important restructuring of the court system, she said, perhaps the most important in the last century. "It's going to be new, different and challenging for everyone," she said.

"But it can also be rewarding."

Both Potts and Hallmark will be up for election next November, to fill their respective unexpired terms of office. They are also expected to run in November 2000, when those terms expire.



STAFF PHOTO BY JELLY ZOLNICK

New posts: Wendy Potts (left), former probate court judge, has been appointed to circuit court to fill the post left vacant by the resignation of Francis X. O'Brien. Linda Hallmark (right) has been appointed to probate court to fill Potts' vacant position.

OU to host Chrysler chair as speaker

Robert J. Eaton, chairman of Chrysler Corporation, will deliver the keynote address at Oakland University's sixth annual Keeper of the Dream Banquet on Feb. 19.

The banquet, a culmination to OU's observation of African American Celebration Month, Jan. 19 to Feb. 20, honors the

legacy of the late civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr.

Keeper of the Dream scholarships will be awarded to outstanding Oakland students for demonstrating strong citizenship, scholarship and leadership in breaking down cultural stereotypes and in promoting interracial understanding.

Suggestions to county merit award

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF REPORTER

If some of Oakland County's employees have butterflies this week, it's understandable. Some will win a trip to Hawaii, Cancun or Toronto.

There winnings are part of the 5th annual Employee Suggestion Program (ESP) that has reportedly save more than \$3 million since being initiated five years ago.

ESP was initiated by County Executive L. Brooks Patterson who calls it one of the most successful innovations of his administration. "We save money by tapping our most precious resource: the men and women of Oakland County," the executive has said repeatedly.

Over the last five years, 944 suggestions have been submitted, according to Jennifer Mason of the county personnel department. While each one was appreciated, 147 were deemed worthy of review, she said, and the employees who submitted them received \$50 each.

Of those, 88 suggestions have been implemented, with 22 waiting to be put in place, Mason said.

One of those came from Maureen G. Code of the county's equalization department. Her suggestion — standardizing some of the forms related to property tax assessments — saves an estimated \$14,000 and won her a trip to Toronto.

"It was exciting," said Code, referring to the suspense leading up to the naming of the winners.

Code, an employee for 24 years, does not have a suggestion under consideration this year. "I'm still going to the banquet," she said. "It's a lot of fun."

"The winners are a closely guarded secret," said Mason. "They have been notified individually, but other information is confidential" to add to the excitement.

This year, 18 suggestions have been implemented, and the people who submitted them eligible for the top prizes.

The top three winners can take the trip, or the cash equivalent. Six other winners got \$500 each.

Money for the prize does not come from tax funds, emphasized Patterson. That money is raised through fund raisers like the ESP golf outing.

The banquet is at 11:30 a.m. Friday at the Northfield Hilton, 5500 Crooks Road in Troy. Tickets are \$15 each.

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