

Experience prepares Potts for judicial role

BY JUDITH DONER BERNE
SPECIAL WRITER

Judge Wendy Potts might feel better knowing that no less than the famous jurist Benjamin Cardozo said: "Justice is not to be taken by storm! She is to be wooed by slow advances."

Monday, the newest judge of Oakland County Circuit Court showed up at 7 a.m. to begin her first day on the bench. But instead of the hectic hours she had envisioned, her day in court pretty much consisted of taking a guilty plea for malicious destruction of property.

A couple of other scheduled cases were settled by attorneys in her anteroom "even though I told them it was my first day on the bench," Potts joked. "I guess they were afraid of me." And so, she had to be delighted when her husband, David Potts, vice president and counsel of the Detroit Lions, surprised her by driving over from his Silverdome office to take her to lunch.

"We tested out the cuisine," David Potts said, as they got ready to exit the cafeteria in the courthouse basement. "Now I know why I haven't eaten here in about 10 years."

Potts, a Birmingham resident, would use her unexpectedly free hours to study up for her first criminal calls set for the next day, and the motion calls she would hear on Wednesday. Both are new to her, since her previous experience as a judge was on the Probate Court.

In fact, a year ago she was an attorney in the Birmingham law firm of Clark Hill P.L.C., where she mainly practiced family law. In February, Gov. John Engler appointed her to Joan Young's

spot on the probate bench as he moved Young up to circuit. Then when Judge Francis O'Brien retired, Engler appointed Potts as his replacement.

"I'm very excited about it," Potts said, from behind a still clean desktop graced by a vase of flowers, set by a well-wisher. On the floor, leaning up against walls they will soon adorn are her law school diploma, framed certificates appointing her to the state Domestic Violence Task Force and the Natural Resources Trust Fund Board, as well as various paintings and photographs. And she awaits more files and new office furniture.

It's hard not to notice that the number of female judges on the Oakland circuit bench keeps expanding — now it's seven of 17. Chief Judge Edward Sosnick believes that's the highest percentage of any circuit bench in the state.

Potts credits Engler for being "gender blind" in the judicial appointments he has made. Over the last year, he has appointed Hilda Gage to the Court of Appeals, Young to replace Gage on circuit and, of course, Potts. Taking Potts' place on the probate bench is still another woman, Linda Hallmark.

When Potts started Wayne State University Law School in the late '60s, she well remembers being one of three women in her class. When she resumed law school eight years later, more than 40 percent of her class were women. And now, they reportedly make up more than half of law school classes.

Indeed one of them is daughter Kelly, who attends law school in Chicago.

In the weeks between her

WENDY POTTS

■ Education: Wayne State University Law school, 1977; University of Michigan, 1966, Mumford High School, 1961.

■ Judicial history: Appointed Judge of Oakland County Probate Court, March 1997; appointed Judge of Oakland County Circuit Court, Dec. 1997.

■ Employment history: Clark Hill P.L.C. (1996-97); Hill Lewis (1993-96); Morris, Rowland, Finkel, Panquette, Keidan & White (1980-83); Clerk, Michigan Court of Appeals (1978-80).

■ Legal and public service: Wayne State University Law School Circle of Visitors, September 1997; Board of Directors of the Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland County, September 1997; Trustee, Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society, September 1997; Member, Governor's Task Force on Domestic Violence, 1994; Secretary, State Bar of Michigan, 1986-97; President Oakland County Bar Association 1994-95.

appointment and actually taking the bench, Potts has made the rounds to observe how her fellow judges run their courtrooms. She's also done a lot of reading and watched tapes on courtroom procedures. "I'm really impressed with her effort," says Sosnick.

With her family law background, you might wonder if she is disappointed not to be a part of the new Family Division of Circuit Court, which opened Jan. 2. But no, she's not. "I had ini-



STAFF PHOTO BY LAWRENCE H. MCKEE

tially wanted a circuit seat," she explains. "I wanted the diversity. I had done a lot of family law, but I also was a law clerk in the Michigan Court of Appeals where we dealt with all kinds of cases."

"I'm looking forward to the criminal and civil cases, having done a lot of mediation." And, in Probate Court, she dealt with juvenile delinquents. "This is where the grown-up juveniles go," she says of circuit.

Potts found probate a very caring, genial place to work. "I would like to bring that level of civility here," she said. "I'm very attuned to attorneys — I know the balancing act they go through. And I want to be very available to the public."

"Some cases need to jell, but some want their day in court immediately." She hopes to have the kind of control over her docket that will allow that to happen.

School for blind is subject of controversy

State Board of Education opines:

Keep blind school

Fred Wurtzel, a blind Lansing resident, said the State Board is making "a large mistake" in parsing down the School for the Blind.

"I've never advocated that all need to attend the School for the Blind, but we need a program the blind can benefit from. We desperately need a board of education and superintendent for the school to set a direction," Wurtzel said.

"In the 1930s and 40s, the children raised and sold chickens. For whatever reason, that went away. An athletic field was put in. There were lots of things we did then. We had a marching band. Show me 30 (blind) kids today in a band. There has been a continuing decline."

"We're not reducing our commitment to children," said Michael Williamson, deputy superintendent. "We're changing it." Board president Kathleen Straus, D-Detroit, said the board will hold a May meeting at the campus of the School for the Blind and Deaf in Lansing.

State tech praised

Mark Westin, representing Apple Computer in Boston, told the board he points to Michigan as a good example of how to integrate technology into teaching.

"There has been a tremendous influx of technology," he said. "But only 3 percent of schools in the U.S. are integrating technology into the curriculum."

Westin said more users are leasing rather than buying computers.

WINTER SPECIALS

PUBLIC AUCTION

Saturday, January 17, 1998 Beginning 10:00 a.m.
Viewing 8:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

Sale Location: 455 E. Scripps Road, Lake Orion, Michigan
(Scripps Road is off M-24 between Silverbell Road and Clarkston Road)
Items to be sold on behalf of Lake Orion Community Schools

Featuring

- File Cabinets • Metal Cabinets • Student Desks • Office Desks
- Metal and Wooden Bookshelves • Secretarial Chairs
- Teacher Chairs • Tables • Assorted Appliances, MacIntosh and IBM compatible computers and printers
- Audiovisual Equipment & Typewriters
- Miscellaneous Furniture

10% Buyers Premium will be charged at this Auction.

Auction Sale Conducted by:
C.B. Kaye & Associates
18530 Mack Ave. • Suite 237
Grosse Pointe Farms, MI 48236
313-365-4610 • FAX 313-365-4636

Nothing may be removed until the buyer has paid in full. All goods to be removed at the risk and expense of the buyer. Please bring your own equipment and assistance for removal of items. Failure to remove items that day forfeits cash and purchased item(s).

CASH ONLY SALE

WINTER SPECIALS

WINTER CLEARANCE AND ONCE A YEAR "SUIT SALE"

LUXURIOUS 100% WORSTED
WOOL SUITS
10% to 50% OFF

Hart Schaffner & Marx, Crickteer, Eagle, Garrison Park and others

Including: *Free Expert Tailoring*

Available in Sizes 38-54 Reg • 38-54 Long
38 to 48 Short • 42 to 48 XLong
Some Portly Sizes Are Also Available

CASHMERE & WOOL TOPCOATS

\$100⁰⁰ OFF and more!
Now from **\$165⁰⁰**

SWEATERS
Fancies, Solids, Acrylics and Cottons

20% to 50% OFF

"ENRO" DRESS SHIRTS
All Fancy Pattern and Dark Solids
Available in Sizes 15-20 Neck • 32-38 Sleeve

20% OFF

SPORT COATS
Camel Hairs, Cashmores, 100% Wools, and Wool Blends

10% to 50% OFF

REED LEATHERS

20% OFF

OUTERWEAR
By Woolrich, etc.

20% to 50% OFF

OPEN MON.-FRI. 10-9
SAT. 10-6

ELPF TROY MENSWEAR

ROCHESTER RD. AT E. LONG LAKE
MEADOWBROOK PLAZA • TROY
(248) 689-2010