

Executive key to county

In August, voters in Oakland County approved a plan to unify county government under an elected county executive. Oakland became the first county in the state to approve such a plan.

A considerable amount of power and prestige has been concentrated in the new position.

In November, voters will elect either Eugene Kuthy, a Democrat, or Daniel Murphy, a Republican, to a two-year term as the first executive. The man they choose, in many ways, will establish important precedents as to how the office will function and the influence it will have on the operation of county government.

The facing article explains the powers and possibilities of the new office. Below are interviews with the men seeking the job. All three of the articles were researched and written by Robert Kipper, with photographs by Douglas Bauman and Art Emanuel.

OAKLAND COUNTY — The office of county executive, designed to be the most powerful in county government, remains one of the least understood by the public.

In August, county voters overwhelmingly approved a plan to unify county government under an elected county executive.

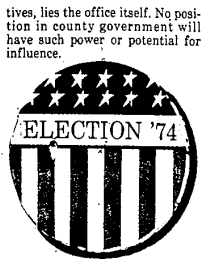
Yet, many are uncertain about the role and responsibilities of the office holds. Even less are aware of the sweeping changes the new office will bring to that least understood organ of government, the county.

THIS NOVEMBER, voters will choose either Democrat Eugene W. Kuthy or Republican Daniel T. Murphy as Oakland County's first executive.

Whoever wins the race has the ideal opportunity to define the job in many ways. Without the precedent of previous executives, the new man will have a freer hand to work with the power given him.

His methods of administration, his partisanship, his personal style, the "stamp" he will place on the job will help determine just how effective the county executive, and the unified county system, will prove to be.

BUT APART from what the winning candidate makes of his office and its powers, and prerogatives, lies the office itself. No position in county government will have such power or potential for influence.



The executive will be in a position, for better or worse, to answer for much of what goes on in county headquarters in Pontiac.

The county executive is the chief administrative officer of the county. The executive is intended to play the same role in the county that the governor plays in the state and the President plays in the nation.

JUST AS Congress advises the President and the state legislature advises the governor, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners will render advice and consent to the county executive.

Unlike the commissioners, who serve part time, the executive will be a full-time administrator. Al-

though his annual salary is still to be determined, it could be upwards of \$40,000.

This November, the winning candidate will be elected to a two-year term. Thereafter, the county executive will be elected every four years — each time voters also choose the President.

The county executive can establish policy and propose programs. He will also have the power to veto any ordinance passed by commissioners and can veto any item in the county budget.

THE COMMISSIONERS, in turn, can override an executive veto by a two-thirds majority vote.

The county executive will be the designated head of all county departments except the road commission, and the offices of clerk, treasurer, sheriff, drain commissioner and prosecuting attorney.

The heads of those six departments will continue to be elected by voters. (The executive can influence these departments by overseeing their budgets. The road commission, however, is the single department that will have total control over its own budget, as prescribed by state law.)

In addition to his prescribed duties, the county executive could become an influential spokesman in the county and state. Elected on a partisan ballot, he would likely be his party's chief spokesman in the county as well.

In August, voters decided that administrative power should be concentrated in a single person. Their remaining decision, which they will make in November, is which person to entrust with this power.

REPRESENTING a county as large and wealthy as Oakland, he could become a champion for suburban and county interests in the way that mayors of big cities promote urban interests.

There will be some drawbacks, as well.

One of the goals in unifying county government under an executive was to make it more accountable. More accountable than any one, due to his considerable power, will be the county executive. Placed up front of county government, no one is in a better position to be scapegoat as well as hero.

Just as the President and governor are often criticized for many things beyond their control, the county executive must be prepared to take the heat as well as praise.

OAKLAND COUNTY is the first county in Michigan to have a county executive.

It remains to be seen if voters will give as much attention to filling the position as they should. The switch to county executive represents one of the most major reforms in this county's history.

Kuthy says, 'Clean it out, change'

Eugene Kuthy, long a political bridesmaid, wants to become a bride.

In years of service to his party and its candidates, Kuthy held posts ranging from state convention delegate to treasurer to his current role as 19th Congressional District chairman. Now, the 43-year-old Democrat is seeking his first elective office as candidate for county executive.

For the first time it is his literature he's passing out, his campaign he's supervising, his programs he's pushing and his rival he's attacking.

KUTHY MADE the decision to emerge from the sidelines of political activity, he said, after working for months with the drive to reorganize county government.

The more he worked, and the more he argued for streamlining the county operation under an elected county executive, the more he wanted the big job for himself.

"I wanted to be the man to make the first footprints in the sand," Kuthy said.

Kuthy said he has spent so much time working for county reorganization and is now spending so much time working for election that it is a bad time to discuss outside interests and pastimes.

A MANAGEMENT consultant for the Ernst and Ernst Co. of Southfield and a part-time teacher of business and government policy at the

University of Michigan, Kuthy is devoting the remainder of his time to his first political race.

Even one of his favorite pastimes — reading — has been altered. Instead of more provocative political science books available, Kuthy said he finds himself reading such titles as "Know Your Oakland County Government" or some latest report of a county department.

Kuthy also said he has less time to devote to his wife, Jacqueline, and their four children, which he regrets. The family, he added, understands and is taking an active interest in his campaign.

BEYOND THOSE TWO outside interests — reading and his family — Kuthy prefers to discuss two other things close to his heart: 1) being elected so he can work from the inside to reorganize the county; 2) defeating Daniel Murphy, the Republican candidate.

Saving his criticism of Murphy for another time,

Kuthy said he feels the man who worked hardest for creating the office of county executive should be the first to hold it. According to Kuthy, he is the man.

"The county has had no obvious smoking scandal," Kuthy said. "But as any patient observer well knows, there is a great amount of overlapping and duplication among county departments and services."

"There is a lack of coordination and the opportunity to confuse and hold up programs."

KUTHY SAID, if elected, he would "clean it out, change it, and make county government responsible, accountable and visible."

As his campaign slogan, Kuthy has chosen "A Dollars Worth of Government for Every Dollar's Worth of Taxes" — a slogan designed to appeal to the cost-conscious disposition of this year's electorate.



Democrat Eugene Kuthy

Murphy knows role

'Buck stops here now'

When 19-year-old Daniel Murphy entered the armed services, in his own words, "he wasn't much."

No particular goals. No plans to continue his education. A former mail clerk at an automobile factory, his stint in the service was unremarkable. "I didn't move much," he said. Murphy left the service at about the same rank he entered.

AFTER THE SERVICE, however, Murphy said he decided to pull himself together. Working in a minor position at the county clerk's office, he entered college part-time. Leaving county government for a good-paying sales job, he returned in 1956 and remained.

Now 51, the father of five children, and the chief administrator of county government for the past 11 years, Murphy is the Republican candidate for county executive.

Although the county executive position is a new one with expanded powers, many of its duties and responsibilities were formerly those of the chairman of the board of auditors — the position Murphy has maintained.

Murphy, in fact, is prepared for few basic changes if voters elect him county executive.

"THE BUCK STOPS with me now," he said, explaining his view that the new position will bring changes more apparent than real.

"People would get to know me better and learn more about my position," he said. "I will be holding press conferences and be issuing more policy statements."

Otherwise, Murphy said his prime function would continue keeping county government functioning.

Murphy agreed his powers would be expanded in one respect: The power to veto ordinances passed by county commissioners.

AT PRESENT, THE board of auditors could only recommend action to commissioners, who had the final say.

"It would give me a better position to negotiate with the board of commissioners," he said. "I could act more decisively for programs than I was able to do as an appointed executive."

Unlike his Democratic opponent — who enjoys participating in politics and reading about it after regular working hours — Murphy devotes off-hours to relaxation.



Republican Daniel Murphy

"I want to spend my free time having fun," he said. "That way I keep from getting ulcers. I relax easy and leave office matters behind."

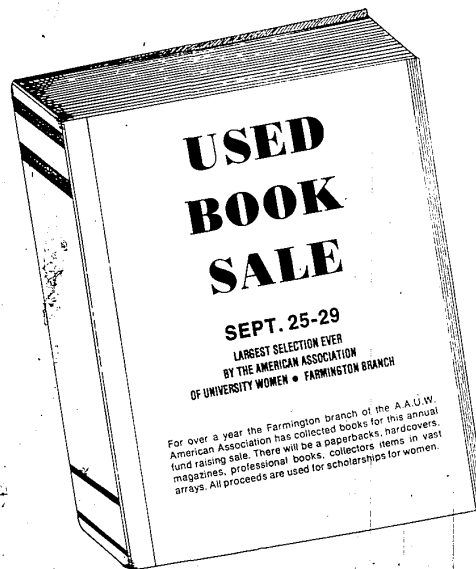
TO MURPHY, "fun" usually means something athletic. His favorite sport, and his family's, is tennis. He also likes golfing and watching races — either horses or sports cars.

Less hectic pastimes, he said, usually consist of "fooling around outdoors," caring for his yard. The Murphy family also enjoys short vacations, such as visits to Toronto.

Murphy said he intends to maintain his relaxation habits if elected in November.

"I'M NOT OBSESSED with power," he said. "I'm not interested in anything but being what I am. I don't intend to use the office to gain higher office."

"In order to be powerful you have to worry about maintaining power," he added. "You can't think about coming home at night and having fun."



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