

Officials busy planning

favor of appointing rather than electing a county head.

Oddly enough, while county voters approved the elected executive concept by a large margin, they placed Murphy, the Republican candidate, in the office.

Election night itself provided unexpected suspense. A faulty prediction by a Detroit radio station early in the

evening declared Democrat Eugene Kutny the winner. However, when all votes were counted, Murphy prevailed if only by a slim margin.

REPUBLICANS ALSO managed to hold on to a majority of the board of commission seats. However, their two-thirds majority was reduced to a more even split of 15 Republicans to 13 Democrats—promising less lopsided partisan battles in the next two years.

With the election out of the way, commissioners buckled down to the business of approving a \$42 million county budget, granting pay raises to county employees that were less than they granted themselves. With little opposition, commissioners passed Murphy's reorganization plan despite the rather guarded way Murphy presented it to the board and the public and despite a \$100,000 price tag.

Not all county issues were partisan, however. The four-year-old debate over a county hospital finally evolved into a compromise proposal that a majority from both sides of the aisle could agree on: A \$23 million nursing care facility to house 120 beds, a pharmacy, an x-ray facility and a small lab, but no operating rooms or emergency care facilities as previous, more elaborate proposals advocated.

The commission also became a sponsor for the federally-funded manpower program to fight unemployment; granted the Department of Social Services an extra \$230,000 to cover the increased demand for general assistance benefits (a demand that all officials agreed would continue to skyrocket next year) opened a halfway house for youths, and voted \$1 million to help upgrade county roads.

1974 WAS essentially a year of personalities, however. Individuals often became bigger issues than programs.

Last year saw the "coming-out" of Murphy, who, while chief administrator for the last 11 years, performed a low-profile, behind-the-scenes function. The new county executive law grants the county head expanded powers plus a new boss. "I no longer work for the board," Murphy said. "Now I work for the people."

Challenged by an aggressive campaign by Kutny, who promised sweeping reform, Murphy spent more time defending his record and programs than he did formulating new programs. And even next year, implementing and tuning his new reorganization plan will come before new programs are formulated, Murphy said.

SHERIFF SPREEN, the highest ranking Democrat in the county, expects this year to show a marked improvement with his relationship with the Republican-controlled administration and board. It could hardly get worse.

Spreen has fought for more men and money to modernize his department, which he says remains "in the horse and buggy days."

His willingness to air all disagreements through the media and his flair for name-calling (two tactics shared by his Republican opponents) made for lively news but little progress or communication in 1974.

Spreen received even more flack when he brought former Detroit police commissioner John Nichols to Oakland County to be his under-sheriff—a move that displaced Leo Hasen, a popular Republican, until Murphy named Hasen to be his aide.

WITH TEN new county commissioners on hand, Spreen expects a smoother new year. However, if a new understanding is to be reached, it won't be, because Spreen has modified his goals. He ended 1974 sounding like he did throughout the year.

Spreen wants his department expanded so it can coordinate the police activities of the various local departments in Oakland County. He advocates providing certain specialized services, such as crime lab work, which individual police units need but may be unable to afford on their own.

Spreen has been called "an empire builder." His reply: "All I'm guilty of is trying to fight crime in Oakland County."

Unless the county is made aware of the growing crime picture so it does something about it on a regional basis, Spreen warns that Oakland is in for the same problems Detroit has.

AS FOR PATTERSON, whose programs many times are less discussed than his own tactics and aspirations, 1974 saw several accomplishments, he said. Patterson admitted that many of the things he was most proud of last year were low-key, little publicized items such as his recommended program for drunk drivers.

Last year also saw the continuation of many of Patterson's more noted crusades: The list of offenses that can no longer be plea-bargained grew longer; most recently, several persons suspected of welfare fraud were issued then before; the number of drug-related convictions rose.

Patterson received more publicity if less results—for his continued criticism of what he considers the inefficiency of the state parole board. He charged that still-dangerous convicts were being paroled because state guidelines weren't specific or tough enough. His suit to stiffen these guidelines



Despite an aggressive campaign, Democrat Eugene Kutny (above) couldn't overtake Daniel Murphy, who carried near-incumbent status into the race for county executive.

lines was still pending in court at the end of the year.

LIKE MOST county officials, however, Patterson looked forward to a more challenging year.

He is particularly interested in the organized crime strike force, recently approved by the county board, which he will head. To be operative early next year, the force will be made up of specially trained investigators and trial lawyers who will work in conjunction with the powers of a grand jury to fight crime on an organized level.

The targets will be drug trafficking, loan shark operations and organized gambling rings in the county. The goal: "To make it as hot for crime at the organized level as we've made it on street crime in the county."

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