

Civic duty eased

National award for jury clerk

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

Janet Lindsey never has been asked to serve.

As jury clerk for the Sixth Judicial Circuit Court, however, she has made it a lot easier for Oakland County residents to do their civic duty.

"It's a challenge to work with the needs of the courts and the people who come in as jurors; to coordinate the two," said Lindsey. "I'm never bored."

STRIVING to make jury week less of a burden for the 7,000 people who serve on circuit and probate court trials each year earned the Pontiac Township resident one of this year's Paul C. Reardon Judicial Administration Awards.

Given by the National Center for State Courts, the \$150 honorable mention went for her paper on the court's Jury Management Program.

"We're still refining our computer program, but now we're able to accommodate almost anything that comes through here," said Lindsey.

The mother of five has an associate degree in math from Macomb County

Community College. She never planned to become a jury expert.

After applying for an Oakland County job 10 years ago, she became a typist in the court administrator's office. A stint in the assignment clerk's office led to her being asked to become become jury clerk.

"ALL THE JURY activities were being done by different offices," recalled Lindsey. "They needed someone to bring everything together."

The award winning paper details the court's Jury Management Program which she oversaw.

The program grew out of the Michigan Legislature's 1978 order that jury duty be made more convenient for citizens and include a broader cross-section of the population. It also did away with exemptions for service.

Federal and county grants helped pay for the changes, which include a computer to keep track of jurors from the time they are notified until they are paid for duty.

Circuit court staff also produced and directed a videotape presentation to let jurors know what was expected of them.

"Most people have never been inside a courtroom before," explained Lindsey, who has lived in the county all of her 48 years but has never been called to serve on a jury.

CIRCUIT COURT sends an extensive questionnaire/questionnaire to 20,000 prospective jurors each year. Handling the preliminaries by mail cuts down on the flow in and out of the court.

The plan includes extensive followup on those who don't respond.

"When they took away the exemptions, it became imperative to come up with a way of handling summonses without disrupting the whole system," said Lindsey, who has taken courses in court administration at Wayne State University. Other changes include shortening service from two weeks to one in order to double the number of people who serve.

"We did reach more citizens and drew a wider cross section," said Lindsey.

SHE SAID she couldn't comment on a recently filed lawsuit alleging that Oakland County Circuit Court jury pools don't adequately represent the county's minority population.



Janet Lindsey, less more jurors, less cost

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Geake: Balanced budget plan won't go

A conservative lobbyist is looking to Michigan for help on passing a "balanced budget" constitutional amendment, but a friendly suburban senator is pessimistic.

"I doubt very much if I will ever get out of committee," said Sen. R. Robert Geake, R-Northville, after James Dale Davidson of the National Taxpayers Union made his pitch Monday to Livonia Rotarians.

Geake was a co-sponsor of Senate Joint Resolution E, which called on the U.S. Congress to call a constitutional convention. Its purpose in asking Congress to call a constitutional convention. The plan needs support from 34 legislators, and 32 have lined up.

Michigan's constitution requires state and local budgets to be balanced annually; the U.S. Constitution does not.

"WE HAD 23 co-sponsors in the Senate," Geake said. "You would think with that kind of support we could pass it."

The Michigan Senate has 38 members, and 20 votes are needed for passage.

But SJR E went to the Senate Administration and Rules Committee, chaired by Democratic Leader William Faust of Westland, and was never reported out, Geake said.

On July 1, Geake and chief sponsor Ed Fredericks, R-Holland, offered a discharge petition to force Faust's committee to report out SJR E. The Senate rejected the discharge petition on a 16-16 tie vote, and SJR E is still in committee.

Supporting the discharge, and thus supporting the constitutional amendment, were Geake; Doug Cruce, R-Troy; Richard Fessler, R-Union Lake; and Phillip O. Mastin, D-Pontiac.

Opposed were Faust; Jack Faxon, D-Southfield; and Patrick McCollough, D-Dearborn.

THE NATIONAL Taxpayers Union takes credit for "singlehandedly leading the fight for a constitutional amendment to require a balanced federal budget and limited federal taxes," according to its literature. It claims 100,000 members.

Davidson, as chairman and primary national spokesman, told the Rotarians he is looking to the Michigan Legislature for support in asking Congress to call a constitutional convention. The plan needs support from 34 legislators, and 32 have lined up.

Asked from the audience if a constitutional convention wouldn't open up the entire U.S. Constitution to dangerous amendments, Davidson replied, "I'm sorry it will never be convened. Congress won't pass it."

But he said Congress itself is "a runaway constitutional convention which can propose any amendment they wish. Congress can propose (amendments) until it's blue in the face."

Davidson said a constitutional convention would be less dangerous than Congress itself because the convention would "be more responsive, more conservative and have more thinking people than Congress. We have far less to fear from a convention than from the dangers of Congress."

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