

Thompson: 'Carry on Brooks' legacy'

Second in a series
By Tim Richard
staff writer

His help apparent. But he's going to have to fight for the job.

Richard Thompson, 50, of Clarkston was Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson's choice to be his chief assistant when Patterson won the office in 1972. Last month, Patterson announced he wouldn't seek a fifth term and said

he would work for Thompson in the Aug. 2 Republican primary.

Q. In terms of the prosecutor's office, what have you been doing the last four years?

A. Basically I've been the chief assistant prosecutor, a statutorily created office. You're the prosecutor when he's absent, ill, or otherwise can't perform his duties.

As second in command, I have day-to-day responsibility for running the office, making sure policies are implemented, the budget is met, all the courts are staffed.

We have a staff of 133 employees — 70 of which are assistant prosecutors, nine investigators, the rest clerical support. We have a budget of over \$7 million. We handle all the state criminal matters in 14 circuit

courts and 33 district courts.

Q. Is hiring involved?

A. Yes. The hiring, firing, discipline normally come through my office.

Q. How do you evaluate attorneys' performance in the courts?

A. Basically we have a yearly performance evaluation that is done by the immediate supervisor of the individual. In addition, we keep statistics on every prosecutor to develop a basis to evaluate people — their skills, their productivity, their industry.

Every month we get a statistical readout on how many cases each prosecutor handled? How many tried? If it was tried, how many guilty as charged? Reduced charges? Was the case dismissed by the court? For what reasons?

Q. Whom do you deal with on a day-to-day basis — division heads or what?

A. I do a lot of things. Number one, I do a lot of investigations. I appear in court on occasion.

As an administrator, I have division chiefs who report to me. We've got a warrants division, district court division, appellate division, family support division, criminal investigations division and administration division.

Q. Where did you grow up?

A. I was born and raised in Dearborn. My father was a worker on the assembly line at Ford Motor Co. He was an immigrant. He never had a formal education himself but felt it was important and focused me on getting a great education.

I went to military school (Staunton, in Virginia) for my prep school years. At one point I was going to



Richard Thompson
chief assistant prosecutor

make the military my career — until (President) Truman fired (Gen.) MacArthur (as UN commander in Korea, 1952).

I went to the University of Michigan and then went into the military as an officer. Went through infantry training school in Fort Benning, Ga., went to Army Intelligence school, and spent the rest of my two years active duty with the Army Intelligence Center in Fort Holabird, Md., outside Baltimore.

Q. What made you decide to become a lawyer?

A. That was something in the back of my mind if I didn't go into the military — the challenge, the adversarial role of the courtroom. It seemed exciting, always interesting.

Q. You've been Brooks Patterson's

chief assistant 16 years. Do you have any priorities in seeking legislation that might be the same, or even different?

A. Not different. Patterson's administration has been basically mine also. The policies that were developed were policies that he and I worked on.

Right after his first campaign (1972), he and I took a vacation together to Mexico, and during that period we laid out our agenda for the prosecutor's office and followed that agenda ever since.

The policies always had one general theme: Make sure the victim is always represented in court, the victim's rights are protected. We developed the no-plea-bargaining policies — starting with drug cases. In 1972, our campaign slogan was 300 drug dealers were arrested, and not one went to trial; they were all plea-bargained away.

Since that time, a number of categories have been added — armed robberies, burglaries, felons in possession of firearms, crimes against senior citizens, violent crimes. . . .

Fifteen percent of the criminals commit 70 to 80 percent of the violent crimes. The most efficient use of our resources would be laws that get at that 15 percent.

In our office, we have a career criminal program — the person convicted one or more times. We file a habitual offender action against him to increase the sentence and lock him up a little longer.

The courts still do not make use of the authority they have to increase the sentence. They will increase it at the top but not at the minimum, which allows the person to get out at the same time as if he had not been charged (as a habitual criminal).

Q. In actuality, the minimum sentence is the real sentence —?

A. Exactly. One of the major objectives I would have is to give minimum mandatory sentences so that the courts don't have the discretion that they will have to sentence the person to a higher minimum sentence.

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