

'Doctor Death' exam to get live TV coverage

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

A New York-based cable television network will provide live gavel-to-gavel coverage of the examination of Dr. Jack Kevorkian beginning Friday morning.

But area viewers will not likely be able to see it unless they want to travel to Battle Creek, Sandusky, Chelsea or other communities in which the local cable company is affiliated with the Courtroom Television Network.

The examination of the so-called Doctor Death — accused of murder for assisting in the Oct. 23 deaths of Sherry A. Miller, 43, and Marjorie

Wantz, 58 — is scheduled to begin at 8:45 a.m. in the courtroom of District Judge James P. Sheehy. It is scheduled to continue Saturday and Monday.

"We'll provide live gavel-to-gavel coverage Friday and Monday," said Jerry Roberts, assistant editorial director of the courtroom network. "And we'll tape the proceedings Saturday."

The network, which started up last July 1, is available to millions of homes nationwide, said Roberts. But no cable companies in Oakland, Wayne, Macomb, Genesee or Lapeer counties subscribe to the service.

LOCAL TELEVISION stations including WXYZ-TV, Channel 7, have made arrangements to tap into the coverage of the courtroom network, according to District Court Administrator Linda Hammerstein. "But as I understand it, that's for news coverage. They're not going to cover the entire examination."

The courtroom network drew national attention earlier this year when it provided live coverage of the William Kennedy Smith rape trial in Florida. The company is doing the same in the Jeffrey Dahmer sanity hearings.

"We wanted to televise the Mike Tyson trial," said Roberts. But tele-

vision cameras are not allowed in the courtroom in Indiana.

Kevorkian, of course, has been a national figure since June, 1990, when he went public about helping Alzheimer's victim Janet Adkins, 54, of Portland, Or., take her own life in an Oakland County park with the "suicide machine" he invented.

He was charged with murder in the Adkins case, but acquitted after a Clarkston district judge ruled there is no law in Michigan prohibiting assisted suicide.

Earlier this month Kevorkian was arrested after the Oakland citizens grand jury returned murder indictments in the deaths of Miller and Wantz, who died in the Bald Eagle

Recreation Area in Oakland Township.

Prosecutor Richard Thompson said circumstances in their deaths were different than in the assisted suicide of Janet Adkins, although he was not sure Kevorkian would be convicted.

The prosecutor has been critical of state lawmakers for failing to address the issue of assisted suicide and pass laws removing any ambiguity. Thompson wants assisted suicides to be clearly allowed, but some legislators say the state should pass laws establishing guidelines under which they would be legal.

Over the weekend The Detroit Free Press published a poll showing

83 percent of Oakland County residents responding said they did not believe assisted suicide is murder, and they would not vote to convict Kevorkian of murder.

By a 5 to 1 margin, other residents polled throughout the state said they held similar beliefs and would acquit Kevorkian if he sat on his jury.

Kevorkian was in the news again this week for helping Dr. Gary Sloan, a 44-year-old dentist in California, take his own life in March, 1991.

A friend of the dentist was quoted as being critical of Kevorkian's "casual attitude" when providing advice about the suicide.

Commissioners embarrassed by travel expenses

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Hoping to repair what they believe is their tarnished image, Oakland County Commissioners may be doubling up on hotel accommodations and taking other steps to stay within the travel budget.

Then again, commissioner could just raise the limit.

These and other alternatives were discussed at a caucus of Republican county commissioners Tuesday as they started to address an embarrassing problem.

Commissioners overspent their 1991 travel budget by \$39,328 with trips to places like Hawaii, Salt Lake City, Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Phoenix and Travers City.

They spent \$89,030 traveling, well over the \$49,702 allocated, according to the county budget department. Most of the expenses were in-

curved when commissioners went to meetings of the National Association of Counties (NACo) or the Michigan Association of Counties (MAC). Oakland is a member of both organizations, and many commissioners are on steering committees dealing with issues such as mass transportation or solid waste management.

COMMISSIONERS MADE no decisions, other than to continue their review. But they did admit having a problem.

"The public perception is that the county doesn't get any benefit when commissioners go to these meetings," said Commissioner Donata E. Bishop, of Rochester Hills.

Bishop is in a position to be critical about his well-traveled colleagues. County records show he took no trips in 1991, and spent no money on travel. The same is true

of commissioner James Ferraris, D-Pontiac.

As a commission guideline, each commissioner is allowed to spend up to \$1,600 each year on county related travel. Guidelines also require that expenses over \$1,600 be approved by the chairman of the board of commissioners.

Former chairman Hoy Fewell of Oakland Township approved travel expenses in 1991, saying they were legitimate expenses for commissioners participating in NACo or MAC conferences.

But newly elected chairman Larry Crake of Waterford warned that he would not be so tolerant. When commissioners reach that \$1,600 figure, that's it. I'm not approving any additional expenses.

Some commissioners balked, however, saying the \$1,600 guideline figure is arbitrary and inadequate.

"The basic question should be our involvement in NACo and MAC," said commissioner John E. Olsen, of Huntington Woods. "Should we be that involved?"

COMMISSIONER THOMAS A. Law of West Bloomfield agreed. Law, who spent more than \$4,000 on trips to Hawaii, Salt Lake City, Washington, D.C., and Travers City, said he would not have taken the trips if he didn't believe the county benefited.

"Each of us can cut cases about how ideas we got at these conferences benefited the county and saved money," he said. "But I know for a

fact that Oakland would not have a risk management department if it wasn't for my involvement in NACo."

"And the Risk Management Department saves the county millions of dollars each year," Law said.

Commissioner Donn L. Wall, Farmington Hills, said criticism of commissioners' travel is unwarranted. "Attending conferences always

costs more money than we put in for," he said. "And we'd probably all continue to attend even if we aren't reimbursed... to a point."

Commissioner John G. Pappageorge of Troy said commissioners must devise some policy that allows participation in NACo and other meaningful organizations without spending too much money.

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