

New director to increase focus on minority issues

The Observer & Eccentric is spotlighting new Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson's appointees and the jobs they'll perform for county residents.

BY JUDITH DONER BEINE
STAFF WRITER

Rebecca Holowicki says she is definitely not a token black in L. Brooks Patterson's new administrative team. "He told me he did not want a token in this department," said Oakland County's new director for community and minority affairs, who is in fact the only black, one of two minorities and one of three women among Patterson's

17 appointees. The 42-year-old, single, Bloomfield Township resident is currently busy drumming up recognition of successful blacks in Oakland County on behalf of Black History Month. Next month she'll lobby for women. She could be on both lists. Holowicki attended Western Michigan University in fine arts and business administration and received a certificate from the Detroit Business Institute. A resident and employee of Oakland County for 20 years, she most recently was chief of operations for Oakland County Employment and Training Division.

One of the agencies she worked with was the Troy Human Resources Center, directed by Dorothy Kaltz.

'Big fan'

"I'm a big fan of Rebecca Holowicki," Kaltz said. "I think she's going to bring an awful lot of vitality and innovation to what she does up there. She built very positive environments. She worked for win-win solutions."

When she was offered the job, which pays between \$46,000 and \$52,000 a year, Holowicki said "I was stunned."

"You're talking about establishing policy. It's a big responsibility. You really appreciate what's going on in Washington. If he (Clinton) doesn't get the right person we're all going to pay."

She knows one of her first missions is to improve Patterson's image among both blacks and women. "The first hurdle that Brooks and I have to overcome is going into the community."

But Holowicki believes that when people meet the new county executive, they will have a different opinion — as she did. "I had heard unflattering things." When she heard former county executive Daniel Murphy would retire and Patterson was the favorite to replace him — she decided to find out first-hand

"what this man was about." So she worked on his campaign.

And she liked what she saw. "I can't excuse the past," she said, in an apparent reference to his record on housing. "All I can do is talk about my own personal experience with Brooks and use that as my platform."

Open up minds

Improving cultural awareness around the county is the biggest challenge she faces. "Because people tend to grow up in their own environment, it will take a lot of opening up of people's minds. A lot of it is unawareness. It's just ignorance."

To that end, she is taking an inventory of and meeting with community leaders from organizations such as the Oakland County Center for Open House, the Birmingham Bloomfield Task Force on Race Relations and Ethnic Diversity, the Pontiac Urban League and the Pontiac-based African-American Festival Committee.

"You can't make people not be what they are — but you can have an effect."

Segments of Oakland County, she says, have been neglected for years. "They need a voice. I may not get what they want — but at least there's an avenue."



JERRY ZOLVINSKY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Strong ties: Rebecca Holowicki has progressed over 20 years working for Oakland County. She says: "The county's been very good to me."

In her spare time she caters to her arts bent. "My number one love is interior decorating. I love to shop for antiques, strip and

stain, garden." She also paints, including a 7-by-5 foot abstract — the focal point of her living room.

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