

Ex-musician holds key to county's development

BY RALPH R. ECHTINAW
STAFF WRITER

The following is another in a series of stories featuring the main appointees of new Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson and the jobs they perform for county residents.

Some people have a song in their hearts, but Ken Rogers has a song in his past.

As the former co-owner of a real estate brokerage firm, Oakland County's new director of community and economic development made a small fortune in real estate. But in the late 1950s Rogers was a budding banjo picker with a folk quartet.

The Wanderers, as the group was named, cut a 45 rpm vinyl recording of tunes called "Shot Down" and "Class Ring."

The former title was appropriate, Rogers said, because "the record was shot down" and few copies were sold.

Although The Wanderers were offered a chance to tour with the Grand Ole Opry, Rogers said, two of the musicians had more tempting, if less artistic, offers of employment, so the group folded and the Opry was left to struggle on without Rogers and his mates.

In his current job, Rogers, 53, is hardly tempted to sing "Shot Down" anymore, considering Oakland County's economic vitality is second to none in the state.

Altogether, Rogers rules over 53 employees in three critical sub departments, i.e. community development, economic development and planning.

Community development people distribute about \$4 million a year in federal block grant money to county communities. Economic development people encourage businesses to locate in Oakland County and aid businesses already here.

The planning department, among other things, helps local downtown development authorities so that they don't have to hire architects.

Takes pay cut
With an annual salary of

\$75,000, Rogers, a Springfield Township resident, has certainly taken a pay cut from his previous job, but it's a sight more money than he dreamed of making in 1959 when he was forced to quit school when his father's mechanical contracting business failed.

"My college career ended with the bankruptcy," he said. "We not only lost our business, we lost our home. I came home and took two jobs. I worked 80 hours a week in a bowling alley cleaning ash trays and toilets for 80 cents an hour. Sometimes I was lucky enough to get 100 hours a week."

Mucking out those ash trays and commodes, however, launched Rogers on his first career in bowling alley management. Before long he was "the youngest (bowling alley) manager in the state of Michigan," working at an alley in Midland.

Offered 10 percent of the profits, if he could generate them, Rogers did so, then found out how much a handshake deal is worth when the owner went back on his pledge, saying that Rogers "should be grateful that (he) had a job."

Rogers quit on the spot, returned home and got a manager job at the 300 Bowl in Waterford, which he returned to profitability within a year. Little did he know at the time that his pro shop manager, Larry Crake, would: A — take over the head manager job when Rogers left, B — buy the bowling alley in 1963, and C — become chairman of the county board of commissioners that approved Rogers' appointment to his current post.

Ties that bind

"I took his job," Crake said. "Then I bought the bowling alley."

Rogers moved on to work in sales for the Michigan Bell Yellow Pages, where he learned that salesmen are the backbone of America. "I'm proud to be a salesman," he said. "Sales people are the movers and shakers of the world."

In the early 1970s Rogers felt



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Neighborhood planning: Ken Rogers looks on as architect Bret Rasegan does a computer makeover for homes on a city block in Pontiac.

confident enough to go into business for himself, establishing L.H.R. Evans & Associates, an Oakland County real estate brokerage house. In seven years the company went from \$1 million in gross sales to \$20 million, Rogers said.

But after 20 years of moving real estate around Rogers was prime for a new challenge, so listened closely when Patterson offered a piece of his administration. "I was at a point in my life where I had to figure out what I

wanted to do with the rest of my life," Rogers said. "And there wasn't any other job in county government that would have interested me at all."

So Rogers sold his share in Evans & Associates and entered government employment for the first time. "I'm going to make dang sure the public gets what is expected from me," he said. "This is the end of my career. When I'm done with this job I'm done working."

Quite the busy fellow, Rogers has also been president of the Oakland County Chamber of Commerce, a community activist (protesting once an Independence Township rezoning that would have made way for a K mart store) and a United Way volunteer for the last 12 years.

"He's one of those guys who, when he's got a job to do, he does it," said Dick Campbell, a former neighbor and soldier against the K mart invasion. "He's an un-

usual person in a very positive way."

"Someone once said, 'You're a yankee doodle dandy,' and I guess I am," Rogers said of his United Way involvement. "I believe that if you had the benefits of this country, you owe something back. Freedom is something you work at. You vote. You do your share in the local community. You go in the service if you're called. Volunteerism is what built this country. I think it's made me a better person."

Free divorce workshops set

The Oakland County Circuit Court is sponsoring a series of free divorce and family counseling workshops.

All workshops will occur from 7-9 p.m. on Mondays at the First United Methodist Church, 1589 West Maple in Birmingham.

March 15: "Helping Children of Divorce Succeed" with Peter Keelin.

Marlinga talks at OCC

Carl Marlinga, the Macomb County prosecutor and candidate for the U.S. Senate, will make a speech at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus 7 p.m. Monday, March 15. Admission is free.

Marlinga's topic will be "Ethics in Business and Government."

A prosecutor for eight years now, Marlinga recently announced that he'll challenge Sen. Don Riegler in the 1994 Democrat-

March 22: "Financial and Legal Aspects of Divorce" with attorney Ron Bookholder.

March 29: "Child Custody, Visitation and Psychological Evaluations" with Lyle Danuloff.

April 5: "He Says, She Says, They Say: Divorce Communication" with Michael Earl and Toby Arons. Call 858-0344.

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