

# Mediation center courts out-of-court settlements

BY RALPH R. ECHTINAW  
STAFF WRITER

Molly Forward is in the business of breaking up fights, and business is very good.

Unlike hockey referees, though, Forward doesn't insert her body between flailing combatants, one hand on the chest of each, and say, "OK, that's enough."

Forward, a Birmingham resident, is boss of an organization called The Settlement Center, which provides trained mediators to settle arguments over dogs, debts, noise, promises and other stuff that might otherwise spill over into some overburdened Oakland County judge's courtroom.

"We're clearing up dockets for cases that belong in the court, and the attorneys appreciate that," Forward said.

One of the situations the center resolved last year was that of a woman sued by her children to pay for their college education.

The woman, who requested anonymity for this story, was newly divorced when her children, encouraged by their father, sued her.

She and her ex-husband both thought the other had agreed in the divorce settlement to pay for the kids' college. When it seemed that the case was headed for a jury trial, the woman's attorney

recommended The Settlement Center.

That was late 1991. Four meetings later, in January 1992, a compromise was reached, and the woman agreed to pay for part of their college fees.

## 'Like a miracle'

"I was amazed at how well it went," she said. "I'd have to say it's like a miracle. I doubt if my kids and I would be able to speak to each other now if we'd gone to trial."

A regular contributor to the center now, the woman (who paid \$32 to have her problem solved) highly recommends the service.

"If there's any goodness in anyone's heart, you'll be able to find it if you sit down and talk it out," she said. (The center's number is 338-4280.)

Last year the center was asked to resolve 800 disputes. In about 450 of those cases the center was successful in getting both feuding parties to sit down and discuss their problem. Of those cases, 93 percent of the disputants reached agreement and 90 percent kept their agreements.

The Settlement Center was established in 1990 after legislation sprang from Lansing dedicating \$2 of every civil suit filing fee to fund 18 settlement centers all

over the state. Of the \$830,000 recently distributed, The Settlement Center received \$170,000, more than twice what any other center got.

With 90 volunteers and four paid staffers, Oakland's center is working with three district courts (the 48th in Bloomfield Township, the 46th in Southfield and the 52-3 in Rochester Hills) to take some of the cases that might otherwise go to court. In that way, Forward said, the judges will have more time to handle the really important cases.

## Lawyers support center

For that reason, the Oakland County Bar Association supports The Settlement Center to the point of even helping it raise money. OCBPA President Edward Gold said it's to the advantage of attorneys to have minor disputes settled through mediation. "Most lawyers wouldn't take these matters anyway," he said.

What the mediators do is sit down with both parties in a dispute and try to find middle



Molly Forward

ground where hands can be shaken and subpoenas buried. It differs from court, Forward said, in that each party in the dispute gets ample time to explain her or his case in detail.

The anonymous woman said

that after the second mediated meeting with her ex-husband, "we were getting beyond the emotions and (asking ourselves), 'What are we going to do about this mess?'"

In court, said Judge Ralph Nelson, "they want to tell their story and they're frustrated sometimes because there are rules we have to follow. They want to get into things that aren't legally relevant."

Furthermore, Forward said, two people might have a longstanding dispute, but "don't go to court until one person punches the other, and the punch isn't the problem." But the punch is all the judge is allowed to consider, so often the real dispute is unresolved, Forward said.

Successful as the center has been, however, many people have been getting their day in court, and therefore eschew mediation as a lesser alternative.

"Our society is very resistant to

anything but going to court," Forward said. "(People) have it in their minds that court includes justice. They also think that, if a judge tells somebody to do something they'll do it."

A pilot program set to get going in the Bloomfield court as soon as the state Supreme Court approves it would require anyone filing a small claim to seek mediation or arbitration first. "We have a duty to try and resolve it before we go into the court system," Forward said.

What's more, mediation is also a far sight cheaper than court fees. How much cheaper? Try free.

They used to charge a small fee for the service, usually less than you'd pay for a good computer game. But six months ago they came up with a great marketing idea. The service is now free, but a voluntary donation is requested. Now they get an average of \$150 per case, Forward said.

Scientific data supports effectiveness of hypnosis

## Elaine Kissel...Free!

For a limited time, Dr. Elaine Kissel, Ph.D., Hypnotherapist will be offering free public appearances to qualified organizations, individuals who are interested in Hypnotherapy as a means of helping relieve stress, tension, anxiety, phobias, procrastination, insomnia, depression, excess weight, pain, sexual problems, etc. Hear America's premiere hypnotherapist speak on "Hypnosis, the wonder way to self improvement." Call 350-2270. Ask for publicity coordinator.

## International School Open House

Saturday, March 27  
2-5 p.m.

The International School is a place where students are given the freedom to explore, the discipline to achieve and the compassion to understand....

....We offer a unique educational program where second and third language skills are supported and encouraged and invite you and your child to see and hear the difference.

33605 Bellvue Trail • Beverly Hills • MI 48015  
(313) 642-1178

Excellence in Education for 25 Years  
Bienvenue • Willkommen • Welcome • Bien Venidos

Just a fraction of what we spend on sports can help keep society in shape.

It's so easy to help your community when you think about it.  
Millions of people have helped make five percent of their incomes and

five hours of volunteer time per week the standard of giving in America.  
Get involved with the **Give Five** causes you care about and give five.

**\$1 MILLION TO SPEND**

U.S. PROOF SETS • MINT SETS  
GOVT BOX "C.C. 51"  
U.S. Gold Coins  
"Sell Where the Dealers Sell!"

**BARNETT RARITIES**  
CORPORATION  
119 HENRIE ST. • BIRMINGHAM 35203  
Phone: (205) 444-1124  
Since 1971

BEST SELECTION OF  
OF HIGH QUALITY  
WOODEN PLAY STRUCTURES

EARLY BIRD SPECIAL  
The Doll Hospital & Toy Soldier Shop  
1211 W. 12th Ave. • Bklyn  
(212) 842-3189 M-F 10-6:30; F-S 10-4

**BATHTUB REFINISHING**  
10 YEAR WRITTEN WARRANTY  
80% OVER REPLACEMENT

199<sup>00</sup>

STANDARD TUB

TOP QUALITY FREE CAULKING EXPIRES 3-31-93 with this coupon

427-3838

**3-DAY SALE!**  
Friday • Saturday • Sunday  
MARCH 26, 27, 28

**20% OFF**

EVERYTHING in the STORE  
With Coupon • Good March 26, 27, 28, 1993 • Birthday Parties Excluded

WALK-INS WELCOMED  
PAINT ANY TIME!!

**FUN WITH PLASTER**  
33405 Grand River • Farmington  
442-2690

6817 Orchard Lake • West Bloomfield  
(Located in West Bloomfield Plaza)  
932-5210

Sign-Up Now For Your Party!

OPEN:  
Mon.-Thurs. & Sat. 11 a.m.-6 p.m.  
Friday 11 a.m.-7 p.m.  
Sunday 12 noon-6 p.m.

**GROHE**  
The Original European

20,886-L1 Ultra Classic Wideset Lav  
White with Chrome Rings

See, feel and compare the quality, craftsmanship and beauty of Grohe... there is a difference.

**HERALD WHOLESALE**  
20830 Coolidge Hwy. Oak Park, MI 48237  
Hours: 9-5:30 Mon-Fri, 9-3 Sat (313) 398-4560

**REMODELING?**  
SOME JOBS AREN'T WORTH THE INVESTMENT. ASK BOB STERN!

ADDITIONS KITCHENS BATHS  
REMODELING IN OAKLAND CO. SINCE 1965

**BOB STERN**  
BUILDING COMPANY  
855-3880

Muriel's Doll House

**DOLLS!**

- Play & Collectible Bears
- Doll Houses • Miniatures
- Custom Doll Houses & Finishing Services Available
- Unique Toys From Around the World

824 Penniman  
Downtown Plymouth  
The Store With The Pink Front  
(313) 455-8110

**"Your Security Is Our Business"**

Uniformed Security Officers  
• Blazer Style Uniforms or...  
• Traditional Police Style Uniforms

Industrial • Retail  
Gate Security & Vehicle Patrol

Providing Quality Security Services for 25 Years in Metro Detroit  
Call today for a Free, No Obligation Security Survey  
313/353-5680

United Security Agency, Inc. • 22511 Telegraph Rd., Suite 201 • Southfield, MI 48034

**PRIVATE SWISS-STYLE SAFE DEPOSIT BOXES**

22 SIZES

HIGHEST SECURITY AND DISCRETION

Monday thru Friday 7:30 AM-9:00 PM  
Saturday 9:00 AM-7:00 PM  
Sundays & Holidays 10:00 AM-4:00 PM

**THE DEPOSITORY**  
540-1255

Also available: computer back-up storage in our tape vaults with efficient and courteous service and couriers

**Before Radial Keratotomy**

**After Radial Keratotomy**

Clearly, the Michigan Eyecare Institute can make a difference

As founders of the Michigan Eyecare Institute, Dr. William Myers and Dr. Mark Rubinstein have been at the forefront of ophthalmologic breakthroughs. Dr. Myers was the second ophthalmologist in the U.S. to perform radial keratotomy — the breakthrough procedure to correct nearsightedness. The Michigan Eyecare Institute was also where the first Excimer laser was located in Michigan. For more information, or to schedule a free screening, call us at 1-800-248-6443.

SOUTHFIELD: 20827 Telegraph, Suite 100 352-2006  
LIVONIA: 14555 Levan, Suite E-101 464-7800  
DEARBORN: 5050 Schaefer 582-7440  
DETROIT: Fisher Building Suite 874 872-2020

MICHIGAN EYECARE INSTITUTE LEADING EYECARE WITH A VISION