

'He was the kind of judge a judge ought to be. . .'

By PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Two concepts quickly surfaced when members of the legal profession talk about John N. O'Brien, the Oakland County circuit judge who died Tuesday in William Beaumont Hospital: judicial temperament and human nature.

O'Brien, who had been on medical leave since February, suffered heart failure apparently related to

surgery for a perforated ulcer. He was 63.

"He was the kind of judge a judge ought to be," said Robert B. Webster, who was a circuit judge with O'Brien for almost 10 years. "He had a great temperament and a unique ability to keep things in perspective."

Another Birmingham lawyer, James M. Alexander, said O'Brien's death represents "a great loss, to me personally and to

the county at large. He had a knowledge of the law and a feel for people.

"He also taught me more about Oakland County politics than anybody else," said Alexander, who as Republican county chairman will have input when Gov. John Engler appoints a successor.

"But we're not going to think about that until after the funeral," said Alexander.

O'Brien was first elected to the circuit court in 1972, after being an Oakland County assistant prosecutor. He was re-elected three times, most recently last November.

Flags at the Oakland County Complex were at half-staff Wednesday in honor of O'Brien who was remembered for, among other things, running an efficient

courtroom while remaining sensitive to the people who appeared before him.

"He knew what motivated people," said Judge William E. Bollo, of the 62nd District Court in Troy, who also practiced law with O'Brien in Royal Oak and will be a pall bearer. "That came through in the way he treated people."

County Executive L. Brooks Patterson said O'Brien was one of the first lawyers he met when he moved to Oakland County in 1968. "We talked politics and law for two decades," he said.

"He was a productive judge," the executive said, "the kind most lawyers like to practice before. He'd let you win or lose a case on your own."

Pete Brown, owner of the Red Coat Tavern on Woodward, said

he knew O'Brien "since the end of World War II and through his law school days (at the University of Detroit). He was a dear friend, an excellent lawyer and an even better judge."

O'Brien and his wife, Delphine (nee Turner) were married Nov. 22, 1958, in Southfield. They lived in Berkeley for 36 years. They have two daughters, Shannon O'Brien and Maureen Orni; three sons, John, Timothy and Patrick; and nine grandchildren, all living in Oakland County.

The funeral Mass will be at 10

a.m. Saturday at the Shrine of the Little Flower in Royal Oak. Burial will be in Roseland Park Cemetery.

Visitation will be from 4 to 9 p.m. today and 1 to 9 p.m. Friday at the Sawyer-Fuller Funeral Home, 2125 W. 12 Mile. Scripture services will be at 7 p.m. Friday.

Memorials are suggested for the Maress Jesuit Retreat House in Bloomfield Hills, the American Heart Association or the Resurrection Choir at the Shrine of the Little Flower.

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