

Pay issue tests right to control budget

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

What started out as a test of principles is becoming a clash of wills over who controls the county budget.

The most immediate concern in this titanic struggle is how — and when — the probate court administrator is to be paid.

Focal point of the dispute is Troy resident Barbara Conallio, who had been probate court administrator for 14 years prior to last month when she accepted early retirement.

Although she is retired with sweeter-than-expected pension benefits, Conallio continues to be court administrator under a contract that will enable her to make about \$300 a day or up to \$41,700 for six months work.

So far, however, Conallio hasn't been paid.

Irrked at what he saw as a deal mocking the county's early retirement program, Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson ordered Conallio's pay withheld. Conallio is yet to draw a pay check as an independent contractor.

"It's luck for us that Barb is so dedicated," said Chief Probate Judge Sandra G. Silver. "Not many people would work without a check."

It's not a matter of whether Conallio will be paid, said Silver. "We have the law on our side. It is the probate court that hires its own personnel."

"The real issue is how and when Ms. Conallio will be paid."

The Michigan Supreme Court administrator is expected to get involved in the dispute, possibly this week, at a meeting between probate court officials, the execu-

tive and county commissioners.

"The executive hasn't changed his position," Patterson press secretary Bob Dustman said Thursday. "He's still opposed to retired county employees coming back as independent contractors."

"But commissioners may review the situation this week," Dustman said, referring to a Wednesday meeting of the county board's personnel committee. "Things could change."

Commissioner Marilyn E. Gosling, R-Bloomfield Hills, said she and other board members are firmly behind the executive.

"We approved the early retirement program in order to cut costs and to control the budget," said Gosling, chairman of the personnel committee. "All those efforts are undercut if we allow departments to rehire people... and allow them to double-dip in

the process."

Gosling stressed that this dispute is a matter of principle, not personalities.

"Everybody knows and likes Barbara Conallio," said the commissioner. "Nobody disagrees about her competency. It's a matter of who controls the budget."

Conallio, in the meantime, tries to go about her business with dignity and efficiency. "I'm here every day," she said. "It's a little awkward because everybody knows about the controversy. But there's a lot of work to do."

Among her highest priorities, Conallio said, is helping the judge select her successor while simultaneously trying to help increase efficiency.

"We lost a lot of people," she said. "And we're being asked to do more with less. I just want to help out."

County attorney group hosts open house

The Oakland County Bar Association, Michigan's largest voluntary bar association, will host an Open House week Jan. 24-28.

Open House hours will be 5-6 p.m. each day except for Tuesday, Jan. 25, when there will be a special wine and cheese reception 5-7 p.m. at its offices, 1750 S. Telegraph Road, Suite 100, in Bloomfield Hills.

OCBA's new headquarters will

feature expanded offices, a continuing legal education (CLE) room, and a mock courtroom as well as state-of-the-art electronic audio and visual equipment. According to OCBA President Thomas Ryan, the driving force behind moving to new facilities is the ability to offer enhanced services to the OCBA members and improve the justice system in Oakland County.

"We're tripling the size of our offices," said Ryan. "We'll have a mock court room where members

can rehearse their final arguments. We'll have rooms for mediation and arbitration conferences and video cameras to tape depositions. And we'll have an expanded area for continuing legal education functions."

"Large law firms are streamlining, and not hiring, so many new members of the bar are setting up offices in their homes. These young attorneys need mentors and the conference space and equipment that can help them better serve their clients."

As a special bonus to OCBA members, those who sponsor a new member within one week of the open house will receive one of the following for each new member: one free CLE program during the bar year; \$25 certificate toward an OCBA function during the 1993-94 bar year; \$25 certificate, which can be used towards members' 1994-95 dues.

The Oakland County Bar Association, established in 1934, has 3,500 members.

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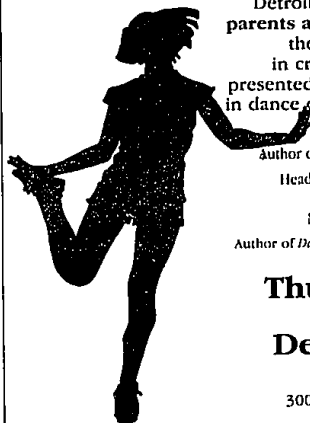
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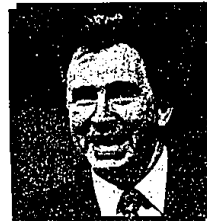
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