

# Judge doles out humor, compassion, reality

[This is the second in a series profiling each of the six candidates running for five seats on the Oakland Circuit Court in the Nov. 6th general election. A 1996 circuit judge's salary is \$109,257. The term is six years. Clipping and saving these stories may help you in your decision-making.]

present. Each was given a smile and a "good luck to you."

But with others, a childless couple of which the woman had been crying, and a civil case involving three generations of a family business, he recessed to work out settlement details in chambers.

Howard says he particularly enjoys his role in settling cases and is proud of his settlement record. In fact he teaches settlement techniques to judges. "My people skills are pretty good," Howard says.

He also works for an easy courtroom atmosphere. Yet, he says, he never has any trouble with control. "It's like a teacher in a classroom. By and large you stick to your guns." "Some kids want to be police (officers). I always wanted to be a lawyer," Howard says. "I'm the first college graduate in my family."

Howard had no trouble deciding his most difficult case. "Without a question it is child custody," he declares. "Everything else pales in comparison."

"It's particularly difficult," Howard explains, "when you

have to choose between two good parents. That's even harder than two bad parents. Those are the ones that you take home and agonize over."

A judge's job is never boring, says Howard, who in his seventh year on the bench was named Chief Judge pro tem. "I love it. I've got the greatest job in the history of the world."

On the Oakland bench, he says, he gets to hear an incredible variety of diverse cases. He is also active in the state judges association. "There are two types of judges," he says, "courtroom and courthouse. I do both."

But he acknowledges the high stress of the job. "Sometimes you don't even want to decide where to go to dinner. The stress among judges is intense. You have to learn how to channel it." He tries to achieve some sort of closure before he goes home to his wife, Cindy, and their three sons.

Howard was rated "Outstanding" by the Oakland County Bar Association. As for the process, "I told them I'd rather be somewhere else."

The five judges up for re-election are running together as has

### CANDIDATE'S BIOGRAPHY

Name: Barry L. Howard. Age: 48 Hometown: West Bloomfield. Education: B.A. with distinction, teaching certificate, University of Michigan (1970); J.D., University of Detroit School of Law (1973). Experience: Current Chief Judge pro tem; Oakland Circuit Judge, Oakland Circuit (1989 to present); practiced law (1974 to 1989); Special Assistant Attorney General (1983-1989); administrative aide, Detroit Mayor Roman S. Gribbs (1971-73); Judicial/legal leadership: Current treasurer, Michigan Judges Association; Member, Executive Board of Michigan Judges Association (1989 to present); former chairperson, State Bar of Michigan Political Action Committee (as practicing attorney); Faculty member, Michigan Judicial Institute (1989 to present). Community contributions: Trustee, Western Michigan University (1986-89); Recipient, State of Israel Bonds Eleanor Roosevelt Humanities Award; Recipient, Man of the Year Award, Police Officers Association of Michigan (1989). Family: Married to Cynthia R Howard; three children, Brian, 20, David, 18 and Chad, 16.



Barry Howard

cent court:  
 •A visiting judge to hear only drug cases has relieved the general docket and cleared up a backlog of hundreds of cases, he says.

•The court is developing a special facilitation program to save time and money in civil cases.

•And this month, a county-wide sweep is scheduled of those who are "chronically and habitually" delinquent in their child support payments.

Howard gives much of the credit for the streamlining to Chief Judge Edward Sosnick who is "open and receptive to changes in the court."

been the custom in the past, even when a weak judge is involved. "Not all judges are good," Howard acknowledges, "but the cost of elections is prohibitive if you have to run alone. The worst thing we do is campaign and the worst thing is campaign finance. It's not a good system."

More judges aren't needed, according to Howard. "It's the staffing and how we utilize the judges." And he's proud of these recent moves toward a more effi-

He is proud of the Oakland Circuit Court, which he says handles a more time-consuming caseload than the rest of the

state. Whereas the rest of the state handles 40 percent domestic and 20 percent civil cases, in Oakland it's the reverse with the number of civil cases double the domestic. The court's criminal caseload — about 25 percent — takes up 60 percent of their time, he says.



BY JUDITH DONER BERNZ SPECIAL WRITER  
 Judge Barry Howard likens his job to a machine gun.

boom, you're making difficult decisions twice a minute. And sometimes you make a mistake because you're rushing. The major fear we have in this county is that sometimes we're more like traffic cops than judges. And sometimes the quality suffers."

But no rush to judgment was apparent on a recent Monday afternoon in his Oakland Circuit courtroom, even as he granted a series of divorces and achieved settlement of a civil case.

Several divorce cases were called and granted with just one member of the couple

## Get voting results via Internet

BY PAT MURPHY STAFF WRITER

Thanks to the Internet, voting results will more readily available than ever before.

Results of the Nov. 5 election will be available on the Internet shortly after they are tabulated locally and reported to the county, according to a spokesman for the Oakland clerk's office.

Details for getting on-line voting results have yet to be finalized. G. William Caddell told county commissioners Thursday, prior to the regular county board meeting. But the idea is to make accurate information available to residents as early as possible.

Most communities currently use some kind of computer enhanced voting systems, according to Caddell, with results tabulated quickly and accurately. Putting those results on line is a logical step to make the information accessible.

Caddell's comments about election results on-line came as two other innovations were in the works, with yet more examples of how technology is changing the way people and governments conduct business.

These examples are:

- Videoconferencing. County officials have scheduled a press conference Wednesday morning to unveil a pilot project that will enable businesses to see and talk with counterparts in Paris and Toronto via cable.

- Web site updates on county proceedings, including the minutes and voting tallies from county board meetings. "People can just call up the home page to get information about the county," explained commissioner Sue Ann Douglas.

High tech is nothing new to Oakland government, of course. Virtually every department has been computerized for some time. But last week's developments point to quicker, more accurate linkage between county government and residents.

Video conferencing, for example, will enable local businesses to business opportunities without leaving Oakland County. By renting video conferencing capacity, for about \$200 per hour, businesses can explore opportunities abroad.

Toronto and Paris were selected as initial sites for the pilot project because the principle partners in the project — the U.S. Department of Commerce, the International Trade Administration and Ameritech — are already located there.

Furthermore Toronto and Paris are already important trading links in Michigan's economy: Michigan exported nearly \$22 million in goods to Canada in 1995. There are 20 French companies and 42 Canadian firms in Oakland County.

"We are very excited about the potential," said Patterson. "It offers access to the international market for small and midsize companies."

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