

JOHN J. O'BRIEN
for
JUDGE of PROBATE
BEST QUALIFIED
pol. adv.

The never-ending battle; Sreen vs. county board

By ROBERT KIPPER

OAKLAND COUNTY—Sheriff Johannes Sreen is: (A) A dedicated professional, attempting to modernize and make more effective an understaffed county sheriff's department. However, he is being blocked by the Republican-controlled Board of County Commissioners for political reasons.

(B) An empire builder, with dreams of a county-wide police organization, who asks for extravagant and unneeded programs that the county can afford.

Setting for either A or B is probably unfair. Although both descriptions have proponents, neither completely answers the question that has been perplexing county officials, and to a growing extent the public, for some time: Who is Johannes Sreen and why is he saying those terrible things about the county commissioners?

The feud between Sreen, a Democrat, and the county administration and commission, both mostly Republican, continues to consume news space and television and radio air time.

IF THE PUBLIC is confused about what the feud is about, it might also be a little annoyed at its persistence. As one county commissioner sees it, the feud is distracting public attention from other pressing county matters.

Robert Snel, Bloomfield Township

analysis

police chief, thinks the dispute is reaching the point where it could jeopardize certain programs being proposed between local police units and the sheriff's department. At any rate, he adds, "People are getting fed up with hearing all the complaining."

Other south Oakland police chiefs, who like Snel won't choose sides in the matter, nevertheless say it's time that the matter be resolved somehow. That's probably good advice, except that neither Sreen, nor his opponents give any indication that the battle is about to subside. Each agrees on one point: the other guy started everything.

Sreen claims he is attempting to bring the sheriff's department out of "the horse and buggy days." He wants the sheriff's department to play a larger role in working with local police units to fight crime, which he says is growing throughout Oakland County.

At Sreen's "mini-summit economic conference," held Tuesday to discuss the growing costs of crime and crime prevention, Sreen urged public support for his efforts to expand personnel and programs of the sheriff's department.

Among other things, Sreen wants to provide back-up services to local police units. Many of these services are highly sophisticated and expensive—difficult for each police department to have on its own. They include providing centralized communications services and crime laboratory services.

However, most of Sreen's expansion schemes have found opposition when considered by county commissioners. Forget the grand design for supportive services, Sreen and commissioners are still fighting over simply adding men.

The sheriff's department has placed a request for 89 more men, Sreen says, in addition to the request for a new administrative position for Under-sheriff Les Hazen, who Sreen will soon replace with former Detroit police commissioner John Nichols.

Whatever new positions are granted, however, they won't come without more hassle.

ACCORDING TO SREEN'S critics, the sheriff has trouble with his requests for two reasons: some commissioners don't know—or suspect—his long range goals; some commissioners disagree with Sreen's tactics. Paul Kasper (R-23), of Bloomfield Hills, thinks that Sreen is "an empire builder" who wants a county-wide police force. "He wants the opportunity to play a bigger role in local police department," Kasper charges.

As for Sreen's tactics, Kasper calls them "disgusting and demeaning."

Among other things, Sreen has been charged with running his department "through the newspapers," frequently publicizing his frustration with commissioners.

Of course, like Sreen, Kasper and other opponents have also never been shy to trade charges—even insults—through the media. Often, after the two sides have blasted each other in the media, their next face-to-face discussion of proposed programs is even more heated.

According to Commissioner Pat Nowak (R-23), of Farmington, he and other commissioners only counter-attack: Sreen makes the first move.

"I defy you to show where commissioners have gone out and taken the first swing," Nowak says.

Not true, says Commissioner Bernard Berman (D-19), of Oak Park.

Having sat through many Sreen-Kasper, Sreen-Nowak quarrels, Berman charged that some commissioners have made "a deliberate political attempt to create a conflict."

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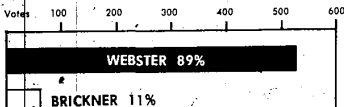
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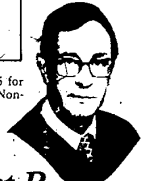
The lawyers who have signed this letter battle each other frequently before Oakland County judges. They are on opposite sides in many arguments. But these lawyers, on behalf of their clients, share one opinion in common. They want a judge who is fair.

Here's an outstanding example: Among 592 lawyers of the Oakland County Bar Association who voted, by secret ballot, for the man "best qualified" to be Circuit Judge, 89% chose Judge Robert B. Webster over his opponent. But that's not enough! Judge Webster needs YOUR vote November 5th.



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