

2006 Annual Report



The Sixth Judicial Circuit Court
Oakland County Probate Court

Letter from the Court Administrators



Kevin M. Oeffner
Circuit Court Administrator



Rebecca A. Schnelz
Probate Court Administrator

Elected Officials and Citizens of Oakland County:

The pages that follow will provide you with general information about Courts, programs, projects, and accomplishments, as well as statistical information on caseload volume and trends. We hope you will find it both informative and useful to your understanding of the judicial system. We welcome your comments and invite you to make suggestions regarding other information you would like to see available here.

The year 2006 was a productive year for the Circuit and Probate Courts. The judges and employees of the Courts deserve recognition for the accomplishments of the year. The dedication, ingenuity, and hard work that led to last year's achievements will enable the Circuit and Probate Courts to meet the challenges that lay ahead with poise and professionalism.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kevin M. Oeffner".

Kevin M. Oeffner
Circuit Court Administrator

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca A. Schnelz".

Rebecca A. Schnelz
Probate Court Administrator



The Meneely & Company bell, once located in the courthouse tower of 1904, was consigned to storage in 1962 due to the demolition of the building. It also bears the name of Nels Johnson (1838-1915) whose tower clocks were synchronized to the bell. Presently it is exhibited on the north side of the Oakland County Courthouse.

Table of Contents

Judicial Bench Photos	3
Letter from the Chief Judges	4
Circuit Court - Civil/Criminal Division	
Civil/Criminal Division Overview	5
Jury Office	6
Case Management Office	7
Circuit Court - Family Division	
Family Division Overview	9
Friend of the Court	10
Court Services	11
Judicial Support	13
Probate Court	
Estates and Mental Health Overview	15
Business Division of the Courts	
Business Division Overview	17
Financial Report	19
Awards and Honors	21
Employees Make A Difference	22
A Year In Review	23

Acknowledgements

The Circuit Court and Probate Court would like to thank the following persons and organizations for their role in the preparation of this Annual Report:

Marcia Travis for managing the project and her work with layout, design, and formatting.

Barbara Felder for preparing the charts and graphs used throughout the report.

John Meiu, *Oakland County Legal News* photographer, for providing the special events photographs, and to Mike Zack of Media & Communications and also photographer Phil DeBarr for their pictorial contributions.

John Cooperrider and Karen Koshen for their assistance in editing the final report.

2006 Annual Report



Judges of the Circuit Court



Front row, left to right: Judge Nanci J. Grant, Judge Denise Langford Morris, Judge Deborah Tyner, Judge Gene Schnelz, Judge Steven N. Andrews, Judge Fred M. Mester, Judge Edward Sosnick, Judge Rudy Nichols, and Judge John J. McDonald. Back row, left to right: Judge Cheryl A. Matthews, Judge Martha D. Anderson, Judge Wendy Potts, Judge James M. Alexander, Judge Daniel Patrick O'Brien, Judge Michael Warren, Judge Joan E. Young, Judge Mark A. Goldsmith, Judge Rae Lee Chabot, and Judge Colleen A. O'Brien.

Judges of the Probate Court



Front row, left to right: Judge Eugene Arthur Moore and Judge Linda S. Hallmark. Back row, left to right: Judge Elizabeth Pezzetti and Judge Barry M. Grant.

Letter From the Chief Judges

Circuit and Probate Judges and Employees, Elected Officials, and Citizens of Oakland County:

We are pleased to present the 2006 Annual Report of the Circuit and Probate Courts. The Report contains information about the functions of the Circuit and Probate Courts, an overview of each division and its responsibilities and accomplishments, and other noteworthy items that attest to the creativity and professionalism of our judges and employees.

The Probate Court introduced a training program for individuals appointed as conservators by the Court. "Basic Training for Conservators" classes are held on a monthly basis for interested fiduciaries. The class is sponsored in part by the Citizens Alliance for the Oakland County Probate and Circuit Courts. Benefits of the program include improving the quality of conservator accounting on behalf of legally protected individuals and reducing court time required to ensure that accounts are filed accurately and timely.

Oakland County started a nationwide trend when the SMILE program was created over 15 years ago. The Start Making it Livable for Everyone program asks parents to consider the impact of divorce on their children, to create a conflict-free zone for parenting and to learn new communications skills. In August, 2006, the revised video used in the program received an award from the National Child Support Enforcement Agency. A group of dedicated volunteers continues to enhance this award-winning program.

Jail Overcrowding didn't go away in 2006, but neither did our resolve to manage the issue. Our felony plea program was expanded to every district court in Oakland County, expediting the resolution of criminal cases involving in-custody defendants and saving jail beds. A local administrative order was agreed to by the circuit court and nine district courts that provides for limited releases of low-risk offenders to avert jail overcrowding. Perhaps our proudest accomplishment was the recommendation of amendments to the Jail Overcrowding State of Emergency Act that may make jail overcrowding emergencies a thing of the past. We expect the Legislature to consider the amendments in 2007.

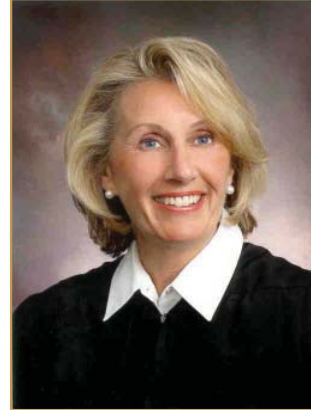
These are but a few of the accomplishments noted in our Annual Report. We hope that the information contained herein is useful and informative. We also trust that it reveals the pride in which we as judges and staff embrace our responsibilities and conveys our commitment to uphold the law and to promote the fair and impartial administration of justice.

Very truly yours,

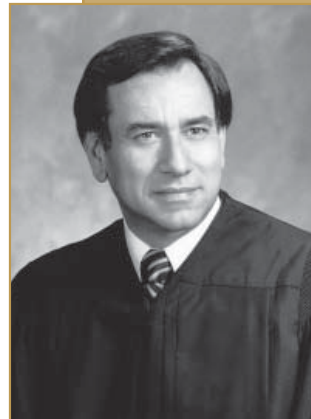
Wendy L. Potts
Chief Circuit Judge



Barry M. Grant
Chief Probate Judge



Wendy Potts
Chief Circuit Judge



Barry M. Grant
Chief Probate Judge

Circuit Court – Civil/Criminal Division



Elizabeth A. Smith
Civil/Criminal Division
Administrator

The Civil/Criminal Division of the Circuit Court manages civil cases over \$25,000 and criminal cases involving felonies. In addition, Civil/Criminal judges are assigned appeals from courts of lesser jurisdiction and administrative agencies. There are 14 judges within the Civil/Criminal Division who are elected for six-year terms in non-partisan elections.

Supporting the judges within this division are 60 judicial staff, including staff attorneys, judicial secretaries, law clerks, and court reporters, as well as the following departments:

Administrative Support Staff – Under the direction of Civil/Criminal Division Administrator Elizabeth Smith, Richard Lynch serves as the Chief-Court Operations/Judicial Assistant. In this capacity, he manages the division’s legal support and criminal case support staff and advises the Court on legal matters. Richard also oversees case management and jury operations for the Court. The Circuit Court’s organizational structure changed in December of 2006 making Richard the Manager – Judicial Support/Judicial Assistant. The Court’s restructuring will be more fully described in next year’s annual report.

Case Management Office – This office is responsible for scheduling and tracking cases through disposition and coordinates alternative dispute resolution (ADR) for the Circuit and Probate Courts. Diane Kratz serves as the Caseflow/ADR Supervisor and is assisted by Andrea Bayer, Caseflow Coordinator; Lisa Czyz, ADR Coordinator; and thirteen additional staff.

Jury Office – The Jury Office coordinates jury operations and obtains jurors for the Circuit and Probate Courts. Becky Young serves as the Supervisor and is assisted by Deborah Fahr, Office Leader, and four additional staff.

Adult Treatment Court – This court offers alternative sentencing for non-violent adult felony offenders who have a history of drug and/or alcohol abuse or dependence. Judge Joan Young presides over the male participants of the Adult Treatment Court and Judge Colleen O’Brien presides over the female participants of the program. John Cooperrider succeeded Elizabeth Smith as the program manager in April of this year and Ellen Zehnder serves as the court coordinator.



The six-story marble tower was ten years in planning and two years under construction. The entire building holds 415,000 square feet of interior space.

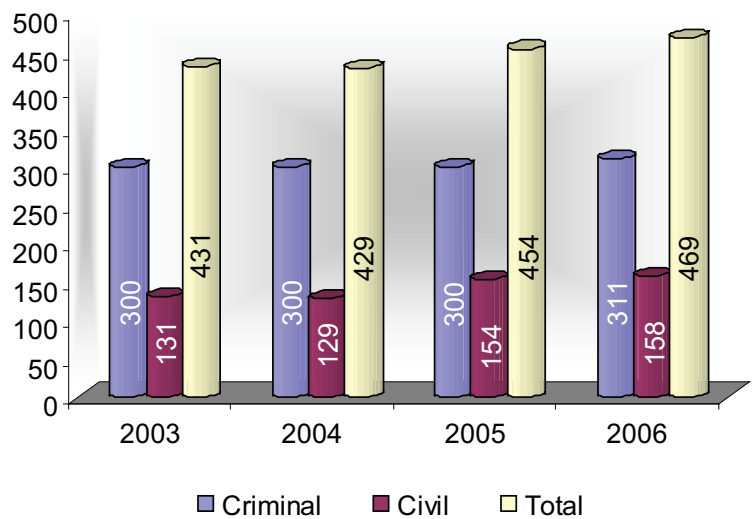
Jury Office

The Jury Office is responsible for obtaining jurors for the Circuit and Probate Courts in Oakland County. Jurors are mailed a summons/questionnaire that schedules them for jury selection. In accordance with the one day/one trial jury system, jurors must be available for selection for one day. If selected to serve as a juror, a juror's jury service is finished when the trial is completed.

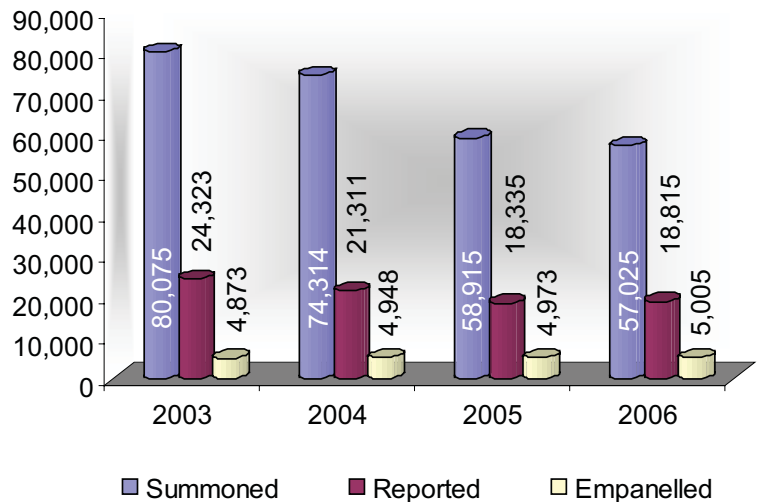
Except for persons exempted from jury service by statute, the courts expect all persons, regardless of status or occupation, to serve when summoned. The only persons legally exempt from jury service are those who do not reside in Oakland County, are not a citizen of the U.S., have served as a juror within the past 12 months, are not physically able to serve, have been convicted of a felony, or are not conversant in the English language. Persons over the age of 70 are exempt upon request.

An orientation is conducted each morning for new jurors explaining what to expect throughout their stay. Several of the judges participate in the juror orientation, which welcomes the jurors and explains courtroom procedures.

JURIES SELECTED



CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT



Accomplishments

- Processed all jury functions and provided jurors to courts for 158 civil trials, with an average trial duration of 3.5 days.
- Processed all jury functions and provided jurors to courts for 311 criminal trials with an average trial duration of 2.5 days. Of those trials, 103 were capital offenses.
- Summoned 57,025 citizens for jury duty. That number was reduced after excusals for legal exemptions. After determining the number needed to accommodate the daily requirements of the courts, 18,815 jurors were required to report for jury service.

Case Management Office

The Case Management Office is comprised of the Caseload unit and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) unit. This office schedules court dates, monitors cases, and analyzes trends of civil and criminal court dockets. It also reviews and distributes weekly docket sheets and monthly pending caseload reports for the Circuit Court judges.

The Caseload unit tracks cases from the initial filing of the lawsuit through final disposition of the case. Within that function cases are scheduled for pretrial hearings, motion calls, Civil Early Intervention Conferences, settlement conferences, trials, and sentencings.

Civil Early Intervention Conferences were introduced by the Caseload office in late 2004 as a way to encourage early communication among the parties. Specific civil cases that were at least 120 days post-filing were selected for the program. Volunteer facilitators work with the parties and discuss different types of ADR processes in an effort to resolve the dispute early in the process.

The ADR unit is responsible for case evaluations and mediations, both of which are methods used to settle

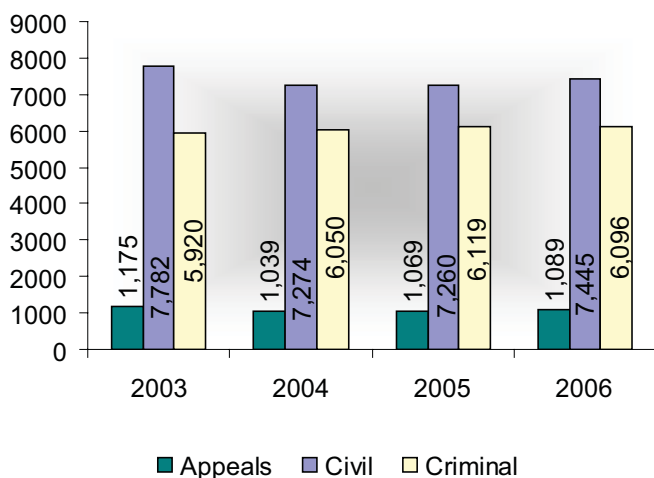
disputes at different time periods prior to the case proceeding to trial.

With the addition of a new technology tool called Workspace, staff are able to predetermine which filed documents are relevant to perform their tasks. These documents, such as case evaluation adjournments, case evaluation dismissals, and domestic relations mediation, are then electronically routed to the user to process. This streamlines the time between an order and the corresponding action.

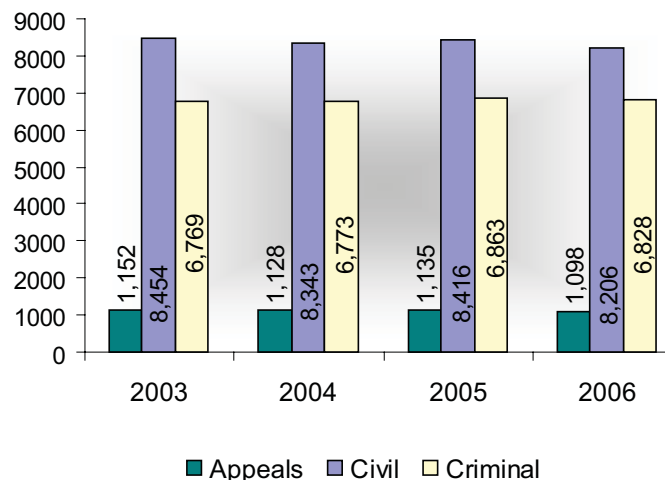
Case evaluation is used as a method of settling disputes shortly before trial. During case evaluation, a panel of three attorneys reviews case summaries, discusses the merits of the case with the attorneys, and places a dollar value on the case. The parties have 28 days to accept the case evaluation award. If the award is not accepted by all parties, the case proceeds to trial.

Another ADR tool is mediation. When a case is selected for mediation, the parties and their attorneys meet with independent mediators to discuss their conflicts. With the assistance of the mediator and the attorneys, the parties work to fashion a possible settlement to the dispute.

NEW FILINGS



DISPOSITIONS



Accomplishments

- Processed over 17,200 scheduling orders in civil cases.
- Settled 72% of the 563 cases submitted to the civil mediation program.
- Scheduled approximately 38,600 praecipes to be heard on Wednesday motion calls.
- Settled 56% of the 1,562 cases submitted to the domestic relations mediation program.
- Settled 33% of the 788 cases submitted to the Civil Early Intervention Conference Pilot Program.
- Distributed \$153,000 to the Oakland County Law Library from late fees assessed to case evaluation.



Spotlight on the Civil/Criminal Division ...

Felony Pleas in District Court

Recent changes to the Michigan Court Rules allowed the Sixth Circuit Court to enter into collaborative agreements with the district courts for arraignment and plea programs on felony cases. Beginning with the 51st District Court in November 2005 and the 52-4 District Court in December 2005, the program expanded to the remaining 13 district courts within Oakland County in 2006. The programs allow District Court judges to arraign felony defendants and to accept pleas, including guilty or nolo contendere pleas, in the arraigned cases. A motivating factor behind the agreements is the identification and resolution of felony cases in which the defendant does not contest the charges. The courts also benefit because incarcerated defendants who do not contest the charges and who are likely to receive probation or prison time may accelerate the process, thereby reducing the time that they spend in the county jail.

It appears that all shareholders are beginning to see the value of the program. Beginning in 2005 with two courts over no more than six weeks, there were five pleas. This number increased to 268 felony pleas for 2006 as participation in the program grew. In each instance, approximately one-half of the defendants who pled were incarcerated in the county jail. Of those defendants, approximately one-half were sentenced to probationary terms or to prison. In sum, nearly one-quarter of all defendants who entered an early plea left the jail up to fourteen days earlier than they would have under traditional case processing. As a result of the expedited resolution of the jail cases, the County realized a savings of up to \$1,190.00 (\$85.00 per day x 14 days) per defendant for those cases in which a defendant who entered a guilty plea in the district courts was sentenced to either probation or to prison.

Circuit Court – Family Division



Lisa Langton
Family Division Administrator
Probate/Juvenile Register

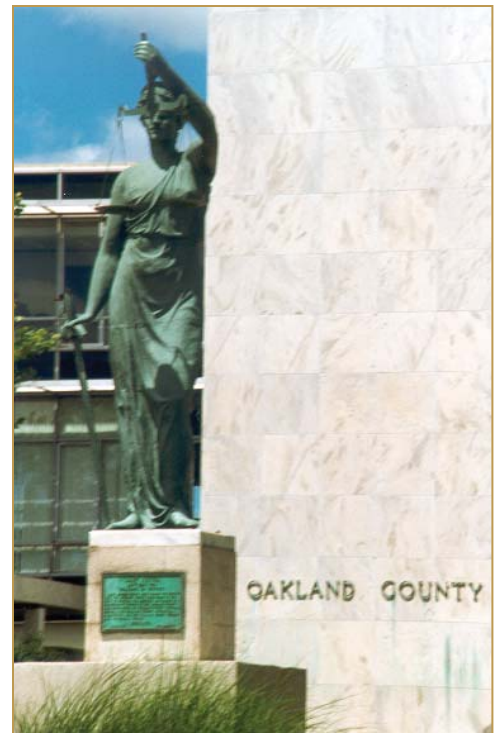
The Circuit Court Family Division, under the direction of Lisa Langton, includes the Judicial Support unit, Court Services unit, the Friend of the Court operation, and the administration of the Probate Court.

Friend of the Court – Administered by the Friend of the Court, Suzanne Hollyer, this operation provides case management and enforcement services on domestic relations matters. Referees, family counselors, investigators, and mediators work in teams to assist the litigants in the management and enforcement of complex family law matters.

Court Services – Lead by Pamela Davis, Manager – Court Services, this unit provides casework and intensive casework services, clinical services through the Psychological Clinic, and community diversion efforts through the Youth Assistance unit.

Judicial Support – This unit is headed up by William Bartlam, Manager – Judicial Support/Judicial Assistant, and consists of the Juvenile Referees, Juvenile Intake, and Juvenile Adoption areas. In Mr. Bartlam’s role as Judicial Assistant, he is also the lead legal advisor for the Probate and Family Division areas.

Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court – Also known as OPTIONS (Owning the Problem - Trusting In Our New Skills), this court integrates drug treatment services with the justice system case processing by including treatment providers on the drug court team. The prosecutor and defense counsel work together using a non-adversarial approach. In 2006, the juvenile drug court was awarded approximately \$613,343 in grant funding, which was used to serve a total 51 youth and their families.



“Lady Justice” has followed the courts from her original home in 1904 at West Huron and Saginaw Streets, to where she stands today at the south end of the courtyard.

Friend of the Court

The Friend of the Court is responsible for assisting in domestic relations cases by investigating and enforcing issues involving custody, support, and parenting time.

The Friend of the Court has been on the statewide child support computer system since July 1, 2003. Although the Friend of the Court continues to accept cash payments on site, all checks are forwarded to the Michigan State Disbursement Unit. Electronic receipt and distribution of child support is encouraged. Support recipients may choose between having support delivered electronically to a bank account or to a debit card, which may be used like a traditional debit card. Conversion to electronic disbursement of support occurred in 2005. Payers of support may make online payments at www.misdu.com.

Friend of the Court referees hold hearings to enforce and modify Family Division orders regarding child support, custody and parenting time. Early Intervention Conferences conducted by FOC referees offer divorcing clients an opportunity to meet with the referee assigned to their case early in the divorce process. This service is unique to the county.

Additionally, the award-winning SMILE program provides information to parents on creating a conflict-free zone for their children during and after a divorce. The SMILE video used in the program was revised in 2006 and received national recognition by being awarded the Program Awareness award from the National Child Support Enforcement Association.

Accomplishments

- Resolved 1,834 medical support issues, including 45 through the referee hearing process.
- Reviewed 1,683 support obligations for modification of the support obligation and enforced 318 support obligations through the use of the license suspension remedy. This work is performed by FOC paralegal staff.
- Resolved 23,440 requests for the enforcement of support, custody and parenting time, 22,175 of which were resolved with referee hearings. Held 5,464 evidentiary hearings by FOC referees.
- Held 2,441 Early Intervention Conferences with parties who filed for divorce in 2005. These conferences assist in the settlement process and provide information to parties about services available at the Friend of the Court.
- Interviewed 1,645 non-custodial parents for Job Placement/Work First referrals. Job placement services are available to all non-custodial parents who are ordered to pay support and who are unemployed or underemployed.
- Assisted in registering 103 out-of-state orders for enforcement or modification in Michigan, in addition to 101 Michigan orders registered in another state.
- Addressed 25,347 custody and parenting time concerns through FOC family counselors, who provided information and services to parents involved in a domestic relations case. Services included mediation, negotiation of make-up parenting time agreements, scheduling contempt-of-court hearings, and preparation of consent orders to modify parenting time.
- Answered 63,529 calls by the switchboard and provided information to 43,984 customers at the front desk.

Court Services

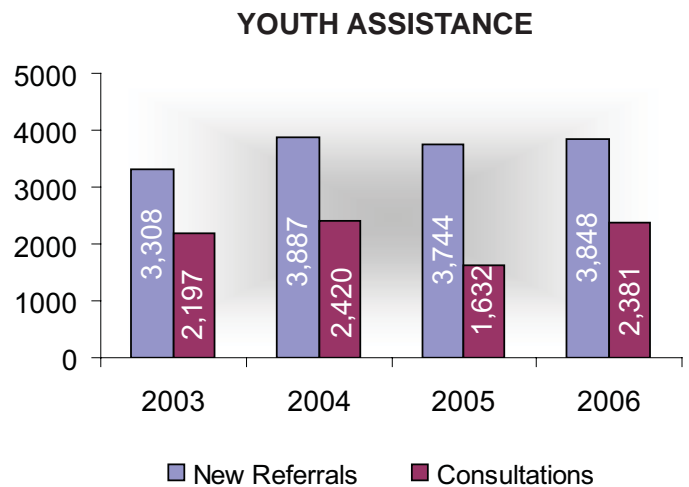
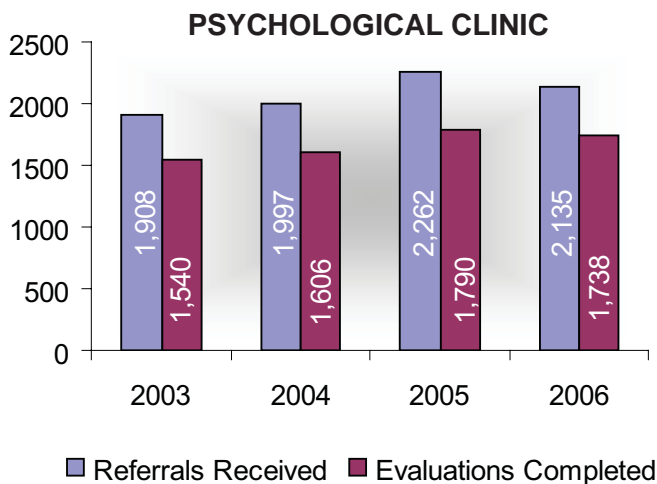
The Court Services operation is comprised of the Casework Services Unit (Juvenile Probation), Psychological Clinic, Youth Assistance, and the Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court Program. Over 100 employees are responsible for providing direct services to clients, performing case management, conducting research and program development, providing education, developing community resources through volunteer coordination, and promoting public awareness.

Casework Services – The Casework Services Unit is responsible for all delinquency cases authorized for the court by the Intake Department and assists cases through the adjudication process when necessary. Upon adjudication, the Casework Unit is responsible for making recommendations regarding disposition. During post-disposition, it assists in implementing court orders, including the monitoring of probation, restitution, community service, restorative justice, parent education, and counseling.

Psychological Clinic – The Clinical Services Unit, also known as the Psychological Clinic, is responsible for aiding Jurists in making informed decisions by providing forensic evaluations of children and families who are involved with the Court. The clinic offers specialized treatment services to clients, and clinicians are available for case consultation with Court staff and others. It also conducts and coordinates training and research, including program evaluations and staff development.

Youth Assistance – As the prevention arm of the Court’s continuum of services, Youth Assistance uses a two pronged approach to strengthen youth and families. Professional staff placed in 26 field offices throughout the county provide family focused casework to at-risk youth referred by the police, schools, and the intake unit of the court. Staff also works with a volunteer board of directors in each community that identify needs and plan and implement primary prevention programs. Youth Assistance has a unique tri-sponsorship structure where staff is hired by the court but each local program is also sponsored by the school district and municipalities.

Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court Program – The Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court program is also known as OPTIONS, an acronym for Owning the Problem, Trusting In Our New Skills. The program’s mission is to “promote public safety and reduce juvenile drug crime rates by helping substance abusing juvenile offenders and their families achieve drug-free lifestyles and healthy family relationships.” The OPTIONS program is a joint effort between the justice and public health treatment systems and is comprised of three phases of intensive court supervision, substance abuse and mental health treatment, and other ancillary services, followed by aftercare of six to twelve weeks. Various incentives and sanctions (penalties) and frequent random drug screening are utilized to ensure compliance with program guidelines.



Accomplishments

- The Casework Unit successfully collaborated with Oakland Family Services to create the Re-entry/Aftercare Program for youth completing the Children's Village and Crossroads programs. The Casework Unit continues to collaborate with Easter Seals/Community Mental Health to deliver quality services to youth with significant mental health issues. Plans are currently being made to expand these much needed services.
- The Psychological Clinic developed a workgroup to review all clinic processes including handling of intake referrals, assignment of cases, and preparation of psychological reports. Recommendations were developed to help the clinic handle the increasing volume of referrals.
- The Juvenile Drug Court, in collaboration with Oakland Family Services, expanded its program in 2006 to include sibling groups and transportation, and a re-entry program to benefit substance abusing youth exiting from residential treatment programs.
- Youth Assistance provided casework services to 3, 848 families referred by police, schools, parents and the court's intake unit. In addition, it received funding from AT&T to host two workshops on Parenting with Love and Logic. The message was received by over 1,000 professionals and parents throughout Oakland County.



Spotlight on the Family Division ...

Oakland County Youth Assistance

Youth Assistance began in Hazel Park in 1953. Over the next 20 years it expanded throughout the county and now encompasses 26 local affiliates. Each Youth Assistance program is co-sponsored by the Oakland County Circuit Court, whose funding comes through the Board of Commissioners, the local school district, and the municipalities therein. The Court provides the professional caseworker for each local Youth Assistance program. The local sponsors provide the office and necessary clerical support.

The approach used by Youth Assistance is two-pronged. The first includes providing family-focused, confidential casework services to youth and families in the community. Referrals to the program come primarily from the police and the schools. Each year close to 4,000 referrals of at-risk youth are received. Community Organization is the second approach used by Youth Assistance. In each local YA area, individuals who live or work in the community come together to form a working Board of Directors. These Boards are responsible for identifying issues in their communities that contribute to delinquency, abuse and neglect, and developing programs to help prevent these problems. Often this is done in collaboration with others in the communities including schools, service clubs, the faith community, and businesses.

Over 1,000 volunteers participate in some capacity – as a member of their local Board, on a subcommittee, or by performing specific tasks like driving kids to camp or helping with fundraising. One of the most dynamic programs of Oakland County Youth Assistance is Mentors Plus. This program has been matching caring adults with young people in need since 1973. Thousands of “matches” have been made over the years, many of which have grown into lasting friendships.

Judicial Support Services

The Judicial Support staff assists judges of the Family Division in the following areas:

- Adoptions and confidential intermediary services
- Child abuse and neglect cases
- Juvenile delinquency and juvenile traffic cases
- Juvenile Court intake
- Personal Protection Orders
- Safe delivery of newborns
- Waiver of parental consent to abortion

In these areas, support staff schedule cases, prepare files, create documents, maintain both public and confidential records, serve summons and other process, and distribute court orders and other materials.

Juvenile referees assist judges by conducting hearings and recommending decisions in these actions. Juvenile Court referees represent the court 24 hours per day,

365 days per year. They authorize the detention of juveniles and removal of children due to risk of harm. Referees review all complaints and petitions referred to the Court. They evaluate each matter and make decisions involving diversions or authorizations of petitions. Referees act as the trier of fact in cases involving delinquency and those involving abuse and neglect of children. They recommend treatment plans for children and parents and monitor delinquents and children in foster care, which may include recommendations for the termination of parental rights.

The attorney appointment specialist maintains a database of attorneys qualified by education and experience for representing indigent parties. The specialist matches eligible attorneys to requests for appointed counsel in Family Division and Probate cases and then processes all pertinent documents relating to the appointment.

SUMMARY OF FAMILY DIVISION ACTIVITY

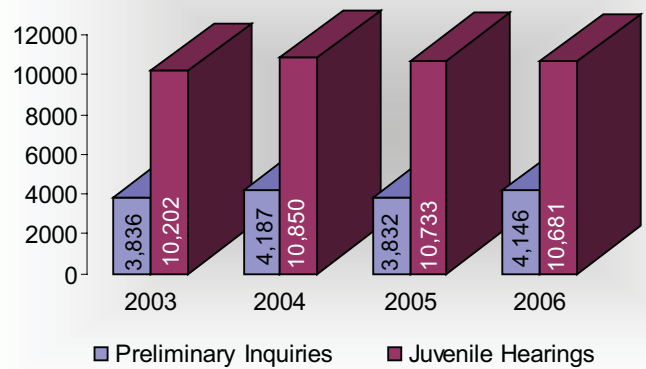
New Filing Activity

	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>
Juvenile/Adoptions				
Delinquency	3,526	3,891	3,918	3,660
Child Protective Proceedings	527	517	603	546
Juvenile Traffic Tickets	409	394	320	374
Adoptions Petitions	436	424	413	425
Subtotal	4,898	5,226	5,254	5,005
Domestic Relations				
No Children	2,651	2,595	2,496	2,629
With Children	2,584	2,520	2,570	2,402
Paternity	531	825	938	1,002
URESAs	272	379	372	315
Support	604	1,056	1,127	1,112
Other	273	272	236	239
Subtotal	6,915	7,647	7,739	7,699
Personal Protection Orders				
Domestic	2,561	2,366	2,119	2,058
Non Domestic	1,162	1,279	1,015	999
Juvenile	85	107	77	71
Subtotal	3,808	3,752	3,211	3,128
Miscellaneous Family				
Name Change	464	452	409	454
Other	140	78	75	33
Subtotal	604	530	484	487
Total New Filings	16,225	17,155	16,688	16,319

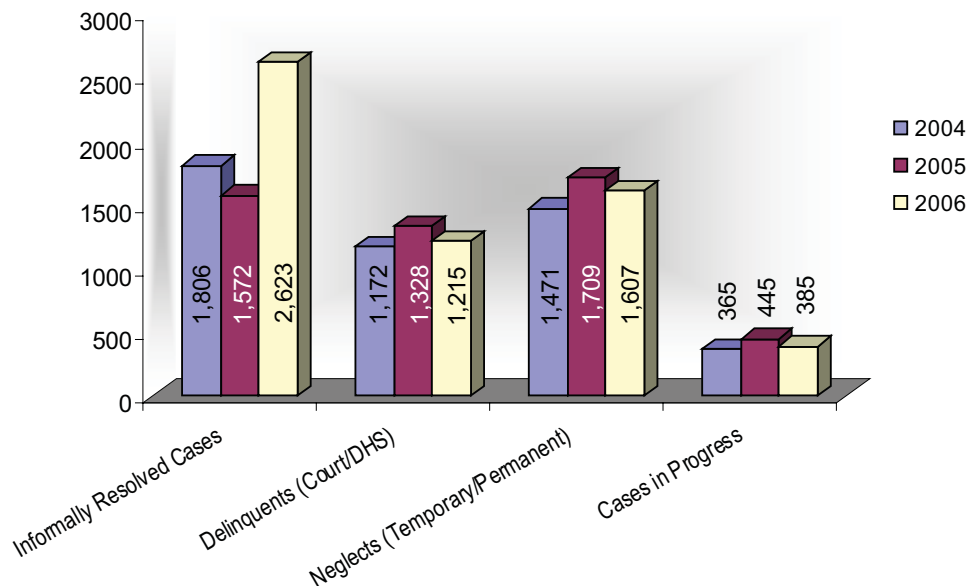
Accomplishments

- Purged over 18 years' accumulation of juvenile traffic files, over 2,300 closed juvenile files, and thousands of names of juvenile from the name search computer records as a result of changes to court rules and retention schedules from the state.
- Provided in-service training on court orders published by the SCAO to judges and court staff. This six-session program across six weeks covered the technical detail necessary to preserve federal financial participation for services in both juvenile delinquency and child neglect and abuse cases.
- Provided principal support to "Michigan Adoption Day," which included the finalization of 19 adoptions and the recognition of Maggie Allesee as the second annual "Arthur Eugene Moore Champions of Children" award recipient.
- Installed a customer service numbering device in the Personal Protection Order waiting room. Also assisted the PPO staff in their transition from Women's Survival Center to HAVEN.
- Assisted the Department of Human Services in establishing a liaison office in Juvenile Intake. This has helped the Court and public receive a rapid response in many time-critical situations.
- Implemented the case age report for juvenile cases and diligently worked to reduce the number of cases that exceed state-prescribed guidelines for disposition. The number of cases exceeding guidelines has been reduced by more than 70%.

JUVENILE HEARINGS vs PRELIMINARY INQUIRIES HELD



CHILDREN IN THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM



Probate Court – Estates and Mental Health

The Oakland County Probate Court maintains jurisdiction over estates, which includes the probating of wills and the administration of testate estates (with a will) and intestate estates (without a will) by personal representatives. The Court interprets wills and trusts in the event of uncertainty or conflict and determines the heirs in intestate estates. The Court also handles trusts, guardianships, conservatorships, mental health proceedings, and civil matters related to estates.

In 2006, the Probate Bench included: The Honorable Barry M. Grant, Chief Judge; the Honorable Elizabeth Pezzetti, Chief Judge Pro Tem; the Honorable Linda S. Hallmark, Presiding Judge of the Estates Division; and the Honorable Eugene Arthur Moore.

The Probate Estates counter is a bustling center of activity as staff process paperwork, set court hearings as necessary, and direct files into court for hearings. Besides decedent estate and trust matters, this department also handles the paperwork and oversight of guardianships and conservatorships of adults and minors, manages the guardianship review process,

and files wills for safekeeping. All legal records of the department are a matter of public record and are available for review by the general public.

Another important function performed by the Probate Court is the handling of proceedings under the Mental Health Code, including involuntary hospitalization of mentally ill persons and petitions for assisted outpatient treatment (also known as “Kevin’s Law”). The Mental Health Division also handles cases involving minors in need of substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation services. Staff is frequently called upon to assist petitioners requesting emergency court orders for immediate transport of an individual to a preadmission screening unit for examination and possible hospitalization for mental health treatment.

The Probate Court’s organizational structure was modified in late 2006 and Probate Register Lisa Langton moved to a new position in Oakland County Circuit Court. Rebecca Schnelz was appointed as the Probate Court Administrator and Jill Koney Daly assumed the duties of Probate Register.

NEW FILES OPENED

	2003	2004	2005	2006
Small Estates	671	692	611	610
Supervised Estates	53	32	36	32
Unsupervised Estates	2,028	1,909	1,886	1,821
Trust-Intervivos	193	195	185	206
Adult Guardianships	870	755	773	791
Minor Guardianships	716	657	693	724
Adult Conservatorships	444	363	378	377
Minor Conservatorships	206	161	177	177
Mentally Ill	1,542	1,457	1,709	2,389
Guardianships (Developmentally Disabled)	258	230	270	236
Reopened Estates and Trusts	112	167	168	191
Protective Orders	30	43	47	44
Civil and Other	188	100	65	108
Total	7,311	6,761	6,998	7,706

ACTIVE CASES (as of December 31) *

	2005	2006
Estate and Trust Cases	3,439	3,992
Adult Guardianships	3,128	3,276
Adult Conservatorships	1,370	1,590
Minor Guardianships	2,775	3,248
Minor Conservatorships	1,428	1,730
Developmentally Disabled Guardianships	1,699	1,653
Civil and Other Matters	61	79
Total	13,900	15,568

**In 2005, a computer data conversion took place when the Probate Court moved to a new computer system. In conjunction with that conversion, data regarding the active cases previous to 2005 is not directly comparable with 2005 and later.*

Accomplishments

- Completed the will relocation project and resumed primary management and record keeping responsibility for safekeeping of wills which have been filed with the Court. The project required relocating the physical storage of 80,000 wills and updating the filing system. Benefits include reduced waiting time for customers who are retrieving wills and increased efficiency of the filing system.
- Completed training through the Michigan Judicial Institute for twelve probate staff members on providing service to self-represented parties. The training will help to improve customer service by increasing the employees' understanding of how to answer the questions of self-represented parties as fully as possible, without violating the statutory restrictions on providing legal advice.
- Trained 18 new volunteers to perform statutorily required reviews of Oakland County guardianships. The volunteers play a crucial role in Probate Court services by visiting wards and providing reports and recommendations to the Court on the wards' well-being.
- Sponsored a special ceremony in June to honor the Children's Advocates from the National Council of Jewish Women. These dedicated volunteers assist the Probate Court by investigating and making recommendations to the Court relative to petitions for minor guardianships and issues that arise during the guardianships.



Spotlight on the Probate Court ...

The Role of a Conservator

The Oakland County Probate Court maintains jurisdiction over conservatorships for both minors and adults. A conservator is a person who is given Probate Court authority to be responsible for the assets (called an "estate") of an adult or minor. Under the Estates and Protected Individuals Code (EPIC), specific criteria must be met before the Court will appoint a conservator. The purpose of a conservatorship is to protect the property and assets of the protected individual so that they may be used for the care and welfare of that person.

Following their appointment, a conservator must provide to the Probate Court an inventory of the protected individual's assets. Thereafter, the conservator is responsible to provide a yearly accounting of monies spent from the estate's assets. For minor conservatorships, the Oakland County Probate Court requires the conservator to file a petition for permission to spend any of the minor's funds. The Court also monitors the conservatorship files to ensure that the necessary accounts are being filed. At the end of 2006, the Oakland County Probate Court was monitoring over 3,300 active adult and minor conservatorships.

In an effort to assist conservators in fulfilling their statutory duty, the Probate Court and the Citizens Alliance for the Oakland County Probate and Circuit Courts recently began co-sponsoring "Basic Training for Conservators." This informational class is free and is offered on the first Wednesday of each month at the Probate Court. Conservators are welcome to attend as many times as they need. The class is taught by a local attorney and a Probate staff member is also on hand to assist with questions. Participants are provided written information and blank forms, as well as completed samples of the forms with which they will need to be familiar. To obtain additional information on conservatorships and the training class, please visit the Probate Court website at www.oakgov.com/probate.

Business Division of the Courts



*John Cooperrider
Business Division Administrator*

The Business Division is responsible for the development and delivery of business and administrative support services for both the Circuit and Probate Courts. This division is divided into two primary units of operation in order to effectively manage its diverse and complex responsibilities.

The Administrative/Financial unit, under the supervision of Tina Sobocinski, is responsible for developing and monitoring the Courts' \$70 million budget, processing payments for services, such as court appointed attorney payments and personnel transactions, recording attendance and mileage, managing courthouse and satellite office facilities, handling capital improvement and special project requests, and managing the equipment needs of the courts.

Chris Bujak oversees the Data/Technology unit. The responsibilities of this unit include the advancement of court automation, handling day-to-day computer and network issues, managing each of the 14 video courtrooms, and implementing new court technology initiatives. This unit also provides word processing support, including the typing of court documents necessary for the functioning of the court (i.e., court, psychological, and referee reports). In addition, it provides court reporter services for the Court's juvenile referees, creating records of courtroom proceedings, and producing transcripts.

The last area of general responsibility in this division are that of the Court Resource and Program Specialist. Marcia Travis directs the Courts' efforts in this regard. Her responsibilities are coordinating special projects and events, public information management, grant writing, and improvement studies on all aspects of court operations to find alternative ways to perform court functions more efficiently and effectively.



Proudly displayed on the south side of the Courthouse are the County, American, and State flags.

Accomplishments

- Executed the new on-line service Court Explorer, which allows the public to view, for free, Register of Actions and Case Summary information and to order court documents on-line via mail or email.
- Put into operation the new Workspace application in several judges' offices. In addition, monitored the installation of all new computers for Circuit Court judges and employees. In addition, installed the new BIS digital recording systems in four Juvenile Intake Referee Hearing Rooms.
- Prepared and submitted the Child Care Fund budget on-line through the new JJOLT for the first time. Also developed and submitted the FY2007 Circuit and Probate Courts' budget.
- Implemented new security measures in November 2006, in coordination with FM&O, which included locking the judicial private hallways with new card readers, intercom systems, cameras, and monitors.
- Established and monitored six drug court grant contracts for more than \$900,000.



Spotlight on the Business Division . . .

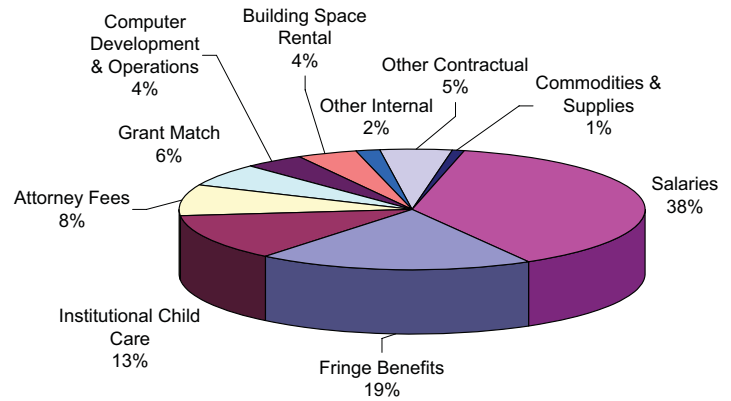
Centralized Digital Recording

On January 1, 2006, the Business Division implemented centralized digital recording within the 14 Circuit Court and Probate Court video courtrooms. Throughout much of 2005, staff planned and worked with Information Technology and Jefferson Audio Video Company to create a new video courtroom environment which essentially moves the Courts from video tapes to DVDs as the preferred method of storing court proceedings. Information Technology created and housed a dedicated network server to store all court proceedings digitally and networked the existing 14 video courtrooms. The business objectives and benefits of this change are numerous and include:

- DVDs replaced videotapes as the form of backup. DVDs are more cost effective and much faster to produce than videotapes (savings \$10,000 annually).
- Significant space savings have occurred. Three CD jewel boxes take as much space as one video tape box. The three-inch ring binders used for video logs are no longer needed.
- Six months of all video courtroom proceedings are kept on the dedicated server for easy and quick access. Two copies of DVDs are maintained for each day's proceedings.
- Timesavings have been realized on retrieving and re-filing court proceedings, re-winding, stopping, and forwarding to search for requested trial portions on videotapes. The reproduction process is significantly reduced (six-hour tape takes six hours to duplicate, six-hour DVD takes six minutes to duplicate), which is a 98% increase in speed for this type of media.
- Quality of the DVDs for producing transcripts and ad hoc reviewing of proceedings is much more clear and concise. Staff make a third copy automatically and send it to the transcription company. This helps speed up the time in producing transcripts.

The Business Division feels this is only the beginning and many new benefits of using this new technology will evolve over the years ahead.

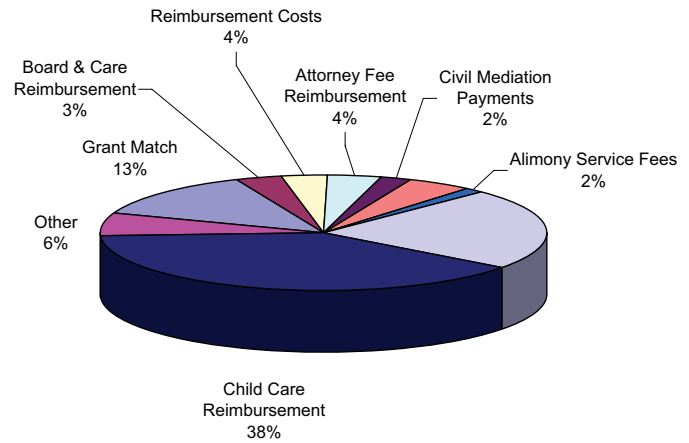
Circuit Court and Probate Court Financial Report



2006 Expenditures: \$70,806,843

<u>Expenditures</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2005-06 % Chg</u>
Salaries	\$24,979,529	\$26,350,042	\$26,828,173	1.8%
Fringe Benefits	\$11,548,299	\$12,656,264	\$13,526,374	6.9%
Institutional Child Care	\$9,032,372	\$8,337,027	\$8,943,362	7.3%
Attorney Fees	\$5,419,799	\$5,371,712	\$5,880,959	9.5%
Grant Match	\$3,068,152	\$3,823,830	\$4,252,106	11.2%
Building Space Rental	\$3,015,136	\$3,076,692	\$2,960,391	-3.8%
Computer Development & Operations	\$3,155,536	\$2,913,072	\$2,930,940	0.6%
Indirect Costs	\$932,016	\$1,149,509	\$651,888	-43.3%
Professional Services	\$785,729	\$747,445	\$571,260	-23.6%
Mediator Fees	\$695,200	\$654,250	\$606,550	-7.3%
Jury Fees & Mileage	\$859,080	\$724,791	\$843,265	16.3%
Other	\$178,890	\$204,876	\$290,501	41.8%
Postage/Mailroom	\$229,989	\$219,945	\$217,386	-1.2%
Telephone Communications	\$553,084	\$533,192	\$546,760	2.5%
Visiting Judges	\$50,767	\$84,631	\$118,083	39.5%
Overtime	\$123,709	\$51,305	\$66,196	29.0%
Commodities/Supplies	\$194,633	\$226,153	\$250,658	10.8%
Mileage/Leased Vehicles	\$177,874	\$144,966	\$148,646	2.5%
Transcripts	\$234,713	\$222,777	\$248,079	11.4%
Furniture/Equipment Purchase	\$81,746	\$112,585	\$81,140	-27.9%
Printing	\$181,203	\$174,773	\$184,636	5.6%
Copiers	\$92,820	\$74,947	\$73,654	-1.7%
Equipment Rental	\$115,366	\$107,659	\$87,955	-18.3%
Insurance	\$81,186	\$81,186	\$127,646	57.2%
Court Reporter Services	\$32,938	\$27,160	\$21,281	-21.6%
Maintenance Charges	\$60,417	\$92,105	\$66,365	-27.9%
Operating Transfer/Adjust Prior Yrs Revnue	(\$211,567)	\$34,845	\$0	0.0%
Interpreter Services	\$67,816	\$86,781	\$98,721	13.8%
Micrographics/Reproductions	\$19,550	\$11,004	\$16,932	53.9%
Computer Legal Research	\$50,608	\$52,952	\$57,344	8.3%
Library Materials	\$91,967	\$119,319	\$110,592	-7.3%
Software Rental/Lease	\$0	\$375	\$0	N/A
Total	\$65,898,557	\$68,468,170	\$70,807,843	3.4%

Circuit Court and Probate Court Financial Report



2006 Revenues: \$32,828,363

<u>Revenues/Sources of Funds</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2005-06</u> <u>% Chg</u>
Child Care Reimbursement	\$11,427,258	\$11,601,880	\$12,762,800	10.0%
CRP Contract	\$6,756,994	\$6,286,565	\$7,431,990	18.2%
Grant Match (Transfer In)	\$3,046,727	\$3,760,525	\$4,269,967	13.5%
Costs	\$1,194,636	\$1,183,198	\$1,158,248	-2.1%
Federal Incentive Payment	\$2,083,179	\$2,164,488	\$1,511,273	-30.2%
Board & Care Reimbursement	\$959,536	\$1,036,098	\$1,088,673	5.1%
Attorney Fee Reimbursement	\$1,008,308	\$1,061,511	\$1,221,609	15.1%
Civil Mediation Payments	\$803,060	\$763,500	\$736,550	-3.5%
Alimony Service Fees	\$507,107	\$457,348	\$520,569	13.8%
CRP State Supplement	\$369,545	\$211,372	\$115,688	-45.3%
Probate Estate Fees	\$274,798	\$250,403	\$305,705	22.1%
Probation Service Fees	\$175,901	\$178,178	\$181,303	1.8%
Mediation Fines	\$168,300	\$171,375	\$125,212	-26.9%
Reimbursement State County Agent	\$135,400	\$225,666	\$180,533	-20.0%
Reimbursement - Salaries	\$35,525	\$1,861	\$0	N/A
Family Counseling Fees	\$228,495	\$110,535	\$0	N/A
Psychological Clinical Evaluation Fees	\$97,185	\$98,710	\$90,635	-8.2%
Other	\$85,272	\$150,999	\$137,935	-8.7%
Probate Certified Copies	\$91,483	\$125,391	\$136,221	8.6%
Other Probate Filing Fees	\$83,499	\$76,445	\$73,647	-3.7%
Processing Fees	\$64,176	\$57,237	\$64,725	13.1%
FOC Judgment Fees	\$26,000	\$301,800	\$287,500	-4.7%
Jury Fees	\$218,267	\$405,992	\$410,455	1.1%
Probate Will Deposits	\$18,075	\$16,500	\$17,125	3.8%
Prior Years Revenue	\$1,711	\$61,987	\$0	N/A
Total	\$29,971,587	\$30,761,424	\$32,893,443	6.9%

Awards and Honors

2006 EMPLOYEES OF THE YEAR



Employee of the Year awards for 2006 were presented in December to representatives from various areas of court operations acknowledging their contributions to the Circuit Court and Probate Court. Those recognized were: Front row, left to right: Lisa Czyz, ADR Coordinator; Patrina Anthony, Deputy Probate Register II; Kathy Morton, Judicial Secretary; Cynthia Duggan, Office Supervisor II; and Vince Welicka, Friend of the Court Referee. Congratulating the employees were (back row, left to right): Judge Nanci Grant, Circuit Court Judge; Judge James Alexander, Circuit Court Chief Judge Pro Tem/Presiding Judge of the Family Division; Judge Wendy Potts, Chief Judge of the Circuit Court; and Judge Barry Grant, Chief Judge of the Probate Court.

2006 EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR NOMINEES



Employee of the Year nominees also recognized for their service and dedication to the Court were (front row left to right): Tina Stenborg, Sue Bennington, Joanna Papiez, Lori Hale, Maura Hodits, Heidi Pawley, Vicki Shelton, Linda Fleischer, and Christina Viviano. Second row (left to right): Gabrielle Osooli, Barbara Pickens, Kim Voss, Nikki Cain, Beth Whiston, Tina Conlon, Wendy Waring, Laura Roman-Christman, Terrie Marks, Gwynne Starkey, and Marcia Travis. Congratulating the nominees are (back row left to right): Circuit Judges Rudy Nichols, Nanci J. Grant, James Alexander, Chief Judge Pro Tem/Presiding Judge of the Circuit Court; the Honorable Wendy Potts, Chief Circuit Judge; and the Honorable Barry Grant, Chief Probate Judge. Continuing with the nominees (back row) Debi Hool, Sarah Wickham, Jody LaPointe, and Katie Dopke. Not pictured are nominees Bridget Ray, Susan McCoy, and Gerald Gavette.

Employees Make A Difference

The Courts' talented and committed staff make every effort to provide service in a knowledgeable, efficient, and caring manner. The outstanding reputation of the Circuit and Probate Courts is a reflection of this philosophy and the Courts' commitment to service. Throughout the year, unsolicited testimonials recognizing Court employees for service excellence were received from citizens and users of the Courts' service. What follows is a sampling of the recognition received.

Lisa Czyz
ADR Coordinator
Civil/Criminal Division

"I would like to comment on the manner in which this Case Evaluation has been handled by your office. My clients and I have found your office to be extremely efficient and easy to work with regarding the Case Evaluation process. Even though I have been in the practice of law for over 25 years, I have not had the pleasure of Circuit Court work for many years. I am happy to see that my reintroduction into Circuit Court work will be at least pleasurable when dealing with your office."

Heidi Pawley
Deputy Probate Register II
Probate Mental Health

"I wanted to personally thank Ms. Heidi Pawley for making my recent experience at your office a very pleasurable one. I appreciate her assistance so much, as my work can be so stressful. I vote for Ms. Heidi Pawley as Miss Customer Service of the Year. I wanted to let you and her co-workers know she's special."

Psychological Clinic
Circuit Court Family Division

CHOICE had great examples about how to manage and control young adults. I feel the Anger Management was very important. Now I give Tyler praise and encouragement, talking and motivating him and helping him to find what he is good at and to enjoy life.

Karen Evanson
Youth & Family Caseworker II
Circuit Court Family Division

"A note to say thank you for your support and understanding over these past months. A job is a job as some might say but, my experience of you is, this is not the case. You truly have a compassion for what you do and for that, I am most grateful. Danielle's choices are now her own and my hope is that they are one's that lead her on a positive path in life.

I felt that Judge Matthews', Mr. Lynn's, and your parting words were very powerful and I hope that they continue to be with Danielle. Hopefully, my future contact with you will be an update of Danielle's accomplishments in life."

Edward Jones
Youth & Family Caseworker I
Circuit Court Family Division

"Just wanted someone to know what a great job Mr. Jones is doing. My son was in the system and Mr. Jones was only in his life for a short time but he has left a lasting impression on him. It has been awhile now and my son still tells me what Mr. Jones said or did. I can honestly say my son is doing great now and a lot of the credit goes to Mr. Jones. I am very thankful there are people who take the time to get to know the children and give them great advice. Thank you for Mr. Jones!"

Jennifer Robertson
Youth Assistance Caseworker
Circuit Court Family Division

"I do not have words to express my gratitude to Mrs. Robertson. She is an outstanding human being and an experienced professional. Her kindness, her gentle approach, her genuine compassion and skills are something very rare and I wanted to bring to your attention how she has influenced our lives. My daughter's grades have improved and she is acting like a child her age again. I now have peace of mind and hope for the future."

Cassandra Goulding
Youth Assistance Caseworker II
Circuit Court Family Division

"Thank you 10 million times for helping Isabella and Sophia with Clarkston's Clintonwood Summer Camp. I am pleased as a single parent to know I can keep working and they are safe at summer camp! The children are soooo excited and I can breathe again. Thank you for your hard work and patience."

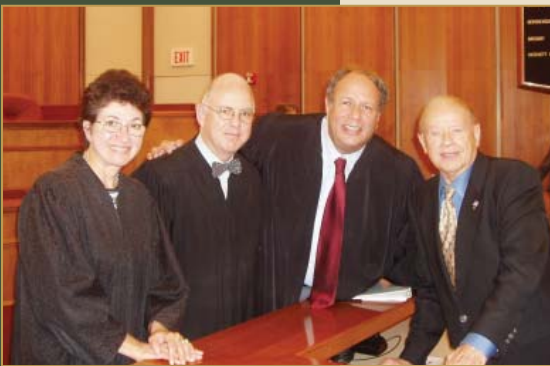
Colleen Bagazinski
Deputy Probate Register
Probate Estates & Trusts

"I wanted to compliment employee Colleen Bagazinski. She helped my brother and I take care of my mom's will. No matter how many questions we had (which were many), she was very helpful and patient, and helped us in filling out the forms. She was wonderful! Colleen made a difficult situation much easier."

A Year In Review



Peter Lewis-Lakin, court clerk to Civil/Criminal Division Judge Steven Andrews, was presented the "Judge Richard and Sally Kuhn Scholarship," intended to help defray educational expenses for court clerks who are enrolled in law school.



"Constitution Day" was celebrated at the Court on September 15. Nearly 300 high school students heard presentations by judges on the first three Articles of the Constitution. The program ended with students learning what it was like to live without a constitution by Holocaust survivor and author Samuel Oeffen (pictured left). To Mr. Oeffen's right are Judges Linda Hallmark, Mark Goldsmith, and Edward Sosnick.



The Probate Court and Circuit Court Family Division honored Children's Advocates for their years of dedicated service to the wellbeing of abused and neglected children at a recognition ceremony in June. Judge James Alexander and Judge Elizabeth Pezzetti presented representatives from the National Council of Jewish Women with a certificate of recognition.



A bronze plaque in memory of the late Judge Sandra Silver was dedicated in October to the Probate Court by the Oakland County Bar Association. Taking part in the ceremony were (left to right) John Shaeffer, newly elected President of the OCBA; Judge Silver's son Ken Silver, attorney at Hertz, Schram, Saretsky, P.C.; Probate Chief Judge Barry Grant, and Judge Silver's son Steve Silver, investment advisor with Bentley Lawrence Securities.

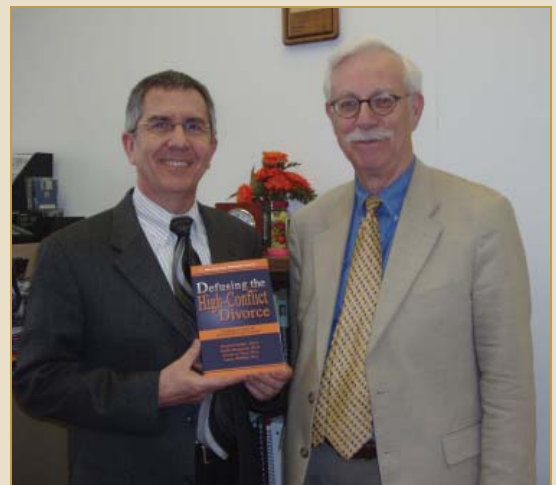
A Year In Review



In 2006 the Circuit Court participated in an e-filing prototype in consultation with the Supreme Court. (Front row, left to right): Circuit Chief Judge Wendy Potts, Judge Michael Warren of the Civil/Criminal Division, and Ruth Johnson, Oakland County Clerk/Register of Deeds, along with (back row, left to right) attorneys Donald McGinnis, President of the OCBA, and Thomas Cranmer, President of the State Bar of Michigan, demonstrated the e-filing prototype at a press conference in February.



Circuit and Probate staff enjoy the holidays with a delicious luncheon set up in the Jury Assembly Room in December. Intake Coordinator Kristin Meekof sits with referees (left to right) Joe Racey, Michael Hand, and Marty Alvin.



Clinic employees Bernard Gaulier, Ph.D. and James Windell, M.A., along with two clinicians in the community, co-authored "Defusing the High Conflict Divorce: A Treatment Guide for Working with Angry Couples." The book, which was published in December, is a practical guide for therapists, attorneys, social workers, custody evaluators, and others who work with high-conflict divorced couples.



"Wrapping Day" on December 12 was a busy event at the Court. Donations helped to stock the shelves at Lighthouse, so families receiving assistance could "shop" for gifts to give their children. This year, staff focused their attention on teen groups by collecting such items as shampoo, body wash, cologne, perfume, hair brushes, and hair accessories and wrapped them in gift packages. Also donated were clothing, hair dryers, curling irons, walkmans, watches, a basketball, baseball glove and baseball, jewelry boxes, and gift cards. Pictured are Gwynne Starkey (left) and Sue Bennington of the Court Administration Office.



Libby Smith, Civil/Criminal Division Administrator, left the Circuit Court earlier this year for the U.S. District Court Eastern Division of Michigan in Detroit. Circuit Chief Judge Wendy Potts presented Libby with a plaque to thank her for her hard work and unwavering commitment to the Court.



To learn more about the Oakland County Circuit
and Probate Courts, please visit the website at
<http://www.oakgov.com>

