

Tribute to Judge Edward Sosnick

by Kevin M. Oeffner
Circuit Court Administrator



For the fifth time in the last eight years we are about to lose a judge with 28 years or more of judicial experience. Judge Edward Sosnick will retire at the end of the year, bringing to a close his very distinguished and productive judicial career.

Let's rewind for a moment and trace Judge Sosnick's path that leads to where he is today. He earned both his

Bachelor of Arts and his Juris Doctor degrees from Wayne State University. He started his career in private practice and soon became involved in municipal law, practicing as a township, city and village attorney.

In 1969 Judge Sosnick joined the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office, where he served for 15 years as an assistant prosecutor and senior trial lawyer. He was elected as a judge in the 48th District Court, a position he held from 1985 to 1988. In the fall of 1988 Judge Sosnick ran successfully for a seat on the Oakland County Circuit Court bench. He took office on January 1, 1989. He was re-elected three times. At the end of his current term he will have served for 24 years, longer than all but nine of the 67 circuit judges in Oakland County's history.

His 24 years are packed with accomplishments. In preparing for this article I reviewed a list of the honors and awards bestowed upon Judge Sosnick during his time on the bench. I couldn't come close to listing them within the confines of this page. What becomes apparent is that many of the honors and awards were presented to Judge Sosnick for his selfless service above and beyond the activities traditionally associated with being a judge. For 24 years he's done his job superbly – managing his docket, meeting with attorneys, issuing opinions and orders – and then it's as if he shifts into another gear and finds a reserve that enables him to tackle an array of issues in which his actions help people who are often the most vulnerable among us. Consider these examples:

Judge Sosnick was the original presiding judge of the Family-Focused Juvenile Drug Court, a service he performed for 10 years beginning with the Drug Court's inception in 2000. His role as the presiding judge meant devoting every other Tuesday night, for 10 years, to provide judicial oversight for hundreds of kids in an effort to guide them toward a drug- and alcohol-free life. He didn't have to do that, but he chose to because he felt he had an obligation and could make a difference. There are many young men and women out there today whose lives were changed for

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the better in no small part because Judge Sosnick cared enough to help them.

Judge Sosnick is also the co-founder of SMILE – Start Making It Livable for Everyone – a court-sponsored program for parents who have a pending divorce case in our court. Divorce often leads to emotional upheaval in the lives of children; they are powerless to control the situation in which they find themselves when parents split. SMILE offers insight and instruction to parents on how they can navigate the emotional and relational part of the divorce process and help their kids cope with and adjust to the changes that are inevitable.

One of the most regretful and damaging issues in our society today is domestic violence. Judge Sosnick saw the resulting physical, psychological and emotional devastation and decided to act. He co-founded the Oakland County Coordinating Council Against Domestic Violence in 1994. He serves as the council’s chair today. This organization works tirelessly to provide needed assistance and support for victims of domestic violence.

As the age of the population increases, so do acts of abuse against the elderly. Six years ago Judge Sosnick assisted in the founding of SAVE – Serving Adults Who Are Vulnerable/Elderly – a task force that he currently co-chairs. SAVE works to increase awareness of elder abuse; improve the response to incidents of elder abuse by the appropriate agencies; develop strategies to prevent elder abuse; and promote the coordination of services for abused, neglected and exploited vulnerable adults.

His service to the citizens of Oakland County goes well beyond the few examples mentioned above. Some people seem to have programmed into their DNA a life of service. Judge Sosnick is one of those people.

I count it a privilege to work with Judge Sosnick. I fondly remember the day when he invited me into his chambers and asked if I could give a five-year commitment. That was when the court was seeking to fill its vacant deputy court administrator position for which I was an applicant. That was nearly 17 years ago. Since that time I have watched him work tirelessly to improve the court and the administration of justice in Oakland County, and to make the court more accessible and efficient.

His leadership in creating the Family Division of Circuit Court in 1997-98 was masterful. He negotiated agreements with the district courts in Oakland County to have the district judges assist in handling civil cases that evaluated for less than \$25,000. This was in response to the Legislature’s repeal of the Remand Statute. Our ADR menu was expanded to include facilitative mediation for civil cases and early intervention conferences for divorce proceedings. And sweeping changes in court restructuring, the most significant in this court’s history, occurred under Judge Sosnick’s oversight.

He may be leaving the bench on January 1, but Judge Sosnick plans to stay involved in the legal profession. I can’t imagine someone so dedicated to public service doing anything different. Judge Sosnick deserves our thanks and gratitude for his exemplary service and the lasting impact he leaves on this Circuit Court.

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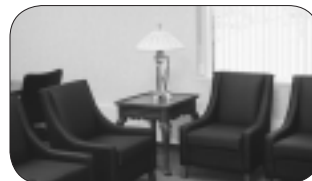
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