

2011 Rewind

*by Kevin M. Oeffner
Circuit Court Administrator*



This article was written during the brief lull between Christmas and New Year's Day. That week is always a good time to reflect on the year that was and take stock of the many changes initiated during the preceding 12 months. Much has happened and so here is a brief rewind of the goings-on at Circuit Court in 2011.

In November we received the news that the Supreme Court reappointed Judge Nanci Grant to the position of chief judge for the two-year term beginning January 1, 2012. This is the second consecutive term for which Judge Grant will serve as chief. Many accomplishments, just a few of which are mentioned in the paragraphs below, were realized during Judge Grant's first term. Undoubtedly many more achievements are on the horizon under her continued leadership as our chief judge. On behalf of the employees of Circuit Court, we offer to Judge Grant our congratulations on her reappointment and look forward to working with her these next two years.

Even though court administrators have budgetary responsibilities, I never imagined so much time would be devoted to this topic. Hardly a week went by over the last several years wherein I wasn't working to identify, research and/or evaluate potential budget cuts for consideration by the bench. One of our recent budget casualties was the elimination of the civil and family visiting judges' dockets. The loss of this function was partially mitigated thanks to the partnership forged by Chief Judge Nanci Grant and several Oakland County district court judges who have volunteered to preside over our PPO hearing docket every Friday. Several district judges have also handled divorce trials and other domestic proceedings, and the expectation exists for even greater sharing of judicial resources in 2012.

A citizens grand jury was impaneled in June – only the fourth such occurrence in the last 22 years. The grand jury is an investigative tool used by law enforcement to compel witnesses to appear and testify regarding unsolved criminal cases.

The court launched its eFiling program in 2007 as a pilot involving one judge and one civil docket. Over the

next couple of years the entire civil docket and three "DO" (divorce without children) dockets were added. In 2011 the program was expanded further to include a single "DM" (divorce with children) docket.

Technological advancement has been a goal throughout the court, including the Friend of the Court. In 2011 a kiosk was installed in the Friend of the Court lobby to assist clients with information retrieval about Friend of the Court operations. People may also download the more frequently used forms while waiting for their hearings. There is also a forms bank in the lobby and convenient online access to all Friend of the Court forms on its website.

The Friend of the Court also made available a jobs bulletin board on its website. People may access the board online and sign up to have email notification of job announcements delivered directly to their email addresses.

A posting of newsworthy events also appears on the Friend of the Court website. Called "Spotlight On," the posting appears in the upper right corner of the Friend of the Court page and contains pertinent information about such topics as Early Intervention Conferences, the award-winning SMILE program, and general information about the Friend of the Court. Access to forms, the job bulletin board and Spotlight On may be had at www.oakgov.com/foc.

The court convened a committee consisting of judges, business law practitioners, and staff from the court and county clerk's office to develop a plan for a specialized business docket. The committee presented a framework for the specialized business docket to the bench in December. The judges will consider the proposal in early 2012. Creation of a plan for a "business court" was proposed by the Judicial Crossroads Task Force – a coalition of judges, lawyers and others with the goal of developing strategies to ensure that the delivery of justice is not eroded by diminishing resources.

We began conducting video arraignments in 2003. Since then we have made increasing use of interactive video technology for conferencing and conducting court

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On the Circuit

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proceedings. In 2011 we joined forces with the Michigan Department of Corrections to enable video conferencing between the court and all MDOC facilities throughout Michigan. Inmates in the MDOC system may now make virtual appearances in court, saving the county time and money by foregoing the execution of writs to transport and hold inmates in the jail.

Our circuit court was one of six statewide that participated in a comprehensive study of the efficacy of case evaluation and mediation. The study was commissioned by the State Court Administrative Office. The courts that participated helped to shape what are the most extensive recommendations to impact case evaluation and mediation in years. The recommendations, issued in late December, are expected to be considered by the Supreme Court in 2012.

Space limitations only permit me to mention a few of the accomplishments and activities engaged in by the Circuit Court last year. Others were documented in the various editions of *LACHES* published in 2011. Many of my previous articles, going back to 2006, now appear on our website and may be viewed at http://www.oakgov.com/circuit/info_pub/articles.html.

In closing, let me take this opportunity to wish the readers of *LACHES* a happy and healthy new year.

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KAREN H. SAFRAN

*Carson Fisher, P.L.C.
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OCBA member since 1994



Karen Safran has been a member of the OCBA for 18 years. She is the current chair of the CLE Committee and the immediate past chair of the Circuit Court Committee. Karen also serves on the Nominating Committee and has been an active participant in Inns of Court for eight years.

Karen is a reformed couch potato, and now is into crazy fitness. In March in British Columbia, she will take a helicopter up a mountain and ski down. In July she will compete in the "Escape from Alcatraz" triathlon, having won a spot by lottery. There, Karen and 1,999 other people will be dropped off at Alcatraz by riverboat, swim 1.5 miles across San Francisco Bay, run a half-mile to her bike and ride 18 miles, and then run eight miles in the hills of San Francisco. Her favorite vacation was a bike tour of Ireland.

Karen's hero is her grandfather David Goldman, who overcame poverty to become an attorney. She is a third-generation attorney and a third-generation WSU graduate. Karen did not decide on law until her second year of college, but her mom knew that Karen would be a lawyer by the time she was seven.

Fun fact about Karen

The one thing most people do not know about Karen is that she took two years of improv at Second City Conservatory in Detroit and has two certificates in funniness!!!