

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Message from Chief Judge .....	2
Overview of Oakland County Probate Court .....	3
Judges of the Probate Court .....	4
Office of the Court Administrator .....	6
Administrative Support Division .....	7
Judicial Support Division .....	8
Juvenile/Adoption Unit .....	9
Estates/Mental Health Unit .....	10
Court Services Division .....	11
Casework Services Unit .....	13
Clinical Services Unit .....	14
Youth Assistance Unit .....	15
Probate Court Staff Make a Difference.....	16
Probate Court: A Year In Review.....	18
Probate Court Volunteers Make a Difference .....	20
Statistics .....	22
Budget and Financial Report .....	29
Staff Recognition .....	30

*Oakland County Courthouse*



# MESSAGE FROM CHIEF JUDGE

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Dear Reader:

It is my great pleasure to present the 1997 Annual Report for the Oakland County Probate Court. This report describes the multiple services and programs provided by the Probate Court and its 239 employees.

1997 proved to be an eventful year due to the pending creation of the Family Division within the Circuit Court. 1997 witnessed Probate Court judges and administration joining Circuit Court judges and administration in a monumental effort to develop a viable and efficient model for the new Family Division within the Oakland County Circuit Court. This planning effort was most significant because the majority of the Probate Court's current personnel and services were scheduled to be assigned to the Family Division effective January 1, 1998. Any such plan required the joint approval of the Chief Circuit Judge, Edward Sosnick and the Chief Probate Judge, Eugene Arthur Moore. Such agreement was reached, and the plan will provide a national model to improve services to children and families.

1997 also saw major movement on the Probate Court bench. In March, 1997, and after having served as Probate Judge since 1989, the Honorable Joan E. Young was appointed Circuit Court judge in Oakland County. Subsequently joining the Probate bench upon the appointment of Governor John Engler were the Honorable Wendy Potts and the Honorable Linda S. Hallmark.

The Probate Court's ongoing success is primarily attributed to its exemplary employees and their commitment to serve the public. Despite the challenge brought on by the Family Division planning project, the Probate Court continued to provide exemplary services to Oakland County citizens in 1997; our superb staff and our dedicated 1,100 volunteers are commended and recognized for their meaningful contributions to Probate Court operations. The probate judges also recognize and value the strong and continued support of County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, and the many county departments which assist with the daily operations of the court.

Thank you very much for your interest in the Oakland County Probate Court. Your observations and suggestions are welcomed as the court continues to seek improved services and programs.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eugene Arthur Moore".

Eugene Arthur Moore  
Chief Probate Judge

# OVERVIEW OF THE OAKLAND COUNTY PROBATE COURT

The year 1997 was a year characterized by ongoing challenges and considerable accomplishments. Beginning January 1, 1998, new legislation brought forth changes in handling certain juvenile offenses under the Juvenile Justice Reform legislation. Also, considerable time was devoted during the year to the preparation of plans for the Circuit Court Family Division, which also began operation on January 1. As the 1997 Annual Report details these planning initiatives and other accomplishments, it is important to reflect and pay tribute to the Oakland County Probate Court's evolution and history since its inception in 1821.

It has been 175 years since the first session of the Oakland County Probate Court was held. Judge William Thompson presided over the irregularly scheduled sessions at that time. As the number of legal matters grew, it was ordered that regular sessions be held each month. Since that first judicial appointment, the citizens of Oakland County have been served by 33 probate judges. *\*In December 1997, Governor John Engler appointed Friend of the Court Referee Linda Hallmark, to assume the judicial seat vacated by Judge Wendy Potts' appointment to the Circuit Court.* It was not until 1961 that the court had more than one judge. Today the Probate Court is represented by four judges who are assisted by eight referees in juvenile proceedings.

The Probate Court found its home on Telegraph Road in the Courthouse Tower in 1962, the Juvenile Court being the first to move to the Oakland County Service Center. Prior to that, the courthouse was located at West Huron and Saginaw Streets, in the City of Pontiac. The first Probate Court operated in the Village of Pontiac beginning in 1823. "Lady Justice" has faithfully followed the court from her original home in 1904 at West Huron and Saginaw Streets, to where she stands today in the middle at the southern end of the courtyard.

Included among the services the Probate Court developed and promoted are the *Youth Assistance Program* of the Juvenile Court created by Judge Arthur E. Moore and Wilfred Webb in 1953; *Children's Village*, also in the 1950's, through the efforts of Judge Arthur E. Moore, James W. Hunt (Juvenile Court Director), and Judge Donald E. Adams; and *Camp Oakland* in Oxford was designed and supported by Judge Arthur E. Moore, James Hunt, and Walter Gehrke, a Detroit businessman. The Oakland County Probate Court also operates its own *Psychological Clinic*, established in the mid-1950s, providing psychological evaluations of children and parents to the court.

In reviewing the early statistics of the Probate Court, it becomes clear how the number of cases opened and processed has grown with the population of the county. Since the Probate Court first held hearings on estates matters in 1823, mental health matters in 1825, and juvenile matters in 1907, many significant milestones have been reached over the years. In 1997, staff processed their 63,994th juvenile file, 261,585th estate file, 28,044th adoption file, and 34,365th mental health file.

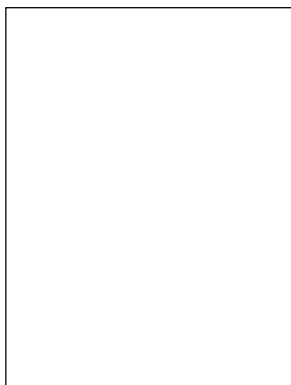
In order to meet the needs of the citizens of this county, dedication, skill, and supportive leadership are needed. The court continues to meet the increased demands through the demonstration of these qualities in each of its employees. In 1984, Probate Court was honored with the talents of Barbara A. Consilio, its first Court Administrator. In 1994, this court welcomed Robert L. Bingham to continue the advancements of this arm of the judicial system. The Court Administrator is supported by a staff today that numbers 239. Recognition and appreciation are extended to all employees as they strive daily to fulfill the multiple and diverse mandates and service requirements of the Probate Court. The Court's talented and committed staff strive to provide services in a prompt, caring and efficient manner. The outstanding reputation of the Oakland County Probate Court is a reflection of this philosophy.

## Judges of the Oakland County Probate Court

1821-1823	Dr. William Thompson
1823-1826	Nathaniel Millerd
1826-1827	Smith Weeks
1827-1828	Gideon O. Whittemore
1828	William F. Mosely
1828-1832	Ogden Clarke
1832-1844	Stephen Reeves
1845-1848	M. Lamont Bagg
1849-1856	Michael E. Crofoot
1857-1861	Oscar F. North
1861-1863	Harry C. Andrews
1863-1868	Z. B. Knight
1869-1872	Alfred Crawford
1872-1873	Junius Ten Eyck
1873-1876	Joseph C. Powell
1877-1880	James A. Jacokes
1881-1884	Joseph C. Powell
1885-1900	Thomas L. Patterson
1901-1909	Joseph S. Stockwell
1909-1918	Kleber P. Rockwell
1919-1928	Ross Stockwell
1928-1937	Dan A. McGaffey
1937-1938	James H. Lynch
1938-1963	Arthur E. Moore
1960-1977	Donald E. Adams
1963-1988	Norman R. Barnard
1967-Present	Eugene Arthur Moore
1975-1988	John J. O'Brien
1977-Present	Barry M. Grant
1988-Present	Sandra G. Silver
1989-1997	Joan E. Young
1997-1998	Wendy Potts
*1997-Present	Linda S. Hallmark

# JUDGES OF THE PROBATE COURT

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*Barry M. Grant* has been a Probate Judge since 1977. Judge Grant served as Chief Judge in 1992 and 1993. He received his law degree from Wayne State University with post-graduate work at Northwestern University and Harvard Law Schools. He is the Secretary of the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission and served as Chairman of the Commission in 1992 and 1993. In addition, Judge Grant served as President of the Oakland County Judges Association. Presently, he is on the Executive Board of the National College of Probate Judges and editor of their national publication. Judge Grant was President of the Michigan Probate Judges' Association and also served as Secretary and Treasurer of that organization. He was formerly an Assistant Prosecuting Attorney and Clerk for the Probate Court. He served on the State Strategic Planning Committee for Mental Health. Judge Grant is a Trustee of Beaumont Hospital and former Chairman of the Hospital's Research Institute. He writes a weekly column for *The Detroit News*. Judge Grant is married and has three adult children.



*Linda S. Hallmark* was appointed to the Probate bench by Governor John Engler in December 1997. Judge Hallmark, of Bloomfield Hills, received her Bachelor of Science degree from Michigan State University in 1973 and her Juris Doctor degree from Wayne State University Law School in 1977. Upon receiving her law degree, Judge Hallmark joined the firm of May & May, P.C. Since 1980 Judge Hallmark was employed by the Oakland County Circuit Court as a Referee for the Friend of the Court. Hallmark is a member of the State Bar of Michigan, the Federal Bar Association, the Oakland County Bar Association. She is a past chair of the State Bar Family Law Section Council and past president of the Referees Association of Michigan. Since 1993 she has served on the Governor's Task Force for Children's Justice. She is an Advisory Board member of the Arab American & Chaldean Council, a member of the Franklin Village Community Association, as well as various other community volunteer organizations. Hallmark is married to Robert Hallmark, an attorney in private practice, and has two daughters.



*Eugene Arthur Moore* was first elected Probate Judge in 1966. He served as Chief Judge from 1989 to 1992 and is currently serving as Chief Judge. He received his B.A. and law degree from the University of Michigan and is the author of numerous articles on juvenile delinquency and the co-author of several legal texts. He is the past President of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and teaches Juvenile and Probate law at the Detroit College of Law, the National College for Juvenile Court Judges in Reno, Nevada, and the Michigan Judicial Institute. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the Judicial Conference of Michigan and is past President of the Michigan Probate Judges' Association. He is a past trustee of Camp Oakland and STARR Commonwealth. He is a trustee at Cranbrook Schools, Eton Academy, and Kingsbury School. He presently serves on the Governor's Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect. He is vice chair of the Michigan Trial Court Assessment Commission. He is a member of the Board of Fellows of the National Center for Juvenile Justice in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Judge Moore is married and has two adult children.



*Wendy Potts* was appointed to the Probate bench by Governor John Engler in February, 1997. She received her B.A. from the University of Michigan and her J.D. from Wayne State University Law School. Prior to assuming her judicial duties, Judge Potts was a shareholder in the Birmingham office of Clark Hill P.L.C. She currently serves as a State Bar Commissioner for District J. Judge Potts was formerly Secretary of the State Bar of Michigan and served as a Member of the Executive Committee. She co-chaired the State Bar's Children's Justice Committee. She serves as Chair of the Judiciary Committee and is a member of the Legislative and Long Range Planning Committees. She is liaison to the Professionalism, Long Range Planning and Judicial Qualification Committees. She chaired the Legislative Committee of the State Bar for three years. She served as Ex-Officio member of the State Bar's 21st Century Courts Committee. Judge Potts served as President of the Oakland County Bar Association in 1994-95. She served on the Governor's Domestic Violence Task Force and as Chair of the Natural Resources Trust Fund. She is a former trustee of the Oakland Bar Adams-Pratt Foundation. She serves as a director of the Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland County. She is a Trustee of the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society. She is a member of the Wayne State University Law School Circle of Visitors. She is a Fellow of the Michigan, American Bar and Oakland Bar Adams-Pratt Foundations. She is married and has two daughters.

# JUDGES OF THE PROBATE COURT

*Sandra G. Silver* was appointed by Governor James Blanchard to the Probate bench in June of 1988. She was elected to fill the vacancy in November 1988. Judge Silver received her B.A. from the University of Michigan, and her Juris Doctor Cum Laude from the Detroit College of Law. She served as a County Public Administrator for ten years prior to her appointment, as well as a labor arbitrator. Judge Silver has served on the State Officers Compensation Commission and as investigator and member of a discipline panel for the Attorney Grievance Commission. She has served as a Trustee for the North Oakland YWCA and on the Board of Directors of the Orchards. Judge Silver has previously served as Director of Children's Charter for the Courts of Michigan and presently serves on both the Mental Health Committee and Probate Committee of the Michigan Probate Judges' Association. Judge Silver is married and has three children and six grandchildren.



*Joan E. Young* was appointed Circuit Judge by Governor John Engler on March 10, 1997. Prior to that she was elected Probate Judge in November 1988, and took office January 1, 1989. She received her law degree from Wayne State University. She served as Chief Judge of the Oakland County Probate Court for the 1994-95 term and was re-appointed by the Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court to serve as Chief Judge for the 1996-97 term. Additionally, in August 1996 she was appointed Chief Judge of the 52nd District Court. Judge Young served as a member of the Lieutenant Governor's Special Commission on Adoption and served as Chair of the Legal Subcommittee. Until her appointment to the Circuit Court, she chaired the Michigan Probate Judges' Association's Juvenile Law and Adoption Committee and Juvenile Placement Committee and was a member of the Ad Hoc Judicial Reorganization Committee. Judge Young is a member of the Conference of Special Court Judges of the American Bar Association and has served on the Michigan Supreme Court's Task Force on Gender Bias Issues. Additionally, she has served on the Oakland County Strong Families/Safe Children Coordinating Council, National Foster Care Project Advisory Board and Kinship Care Project. She is currently a member of the Board of Directors of Reading to Reduce Recidivism and the Oakland County Bar Association's American Inn of Court. Judge Young is also a Trustee for the Michigan Opera Theatre, and serves on the Advisory Board of Parents of Murdered Children, Inc., Metro Detroit Chapter. Judge Young is married and has two children.



*After months of planning, Chief Probate Judge, Eugene Arthur Moore (left) and Chief Circuit Judge, Edward Sosnick signed an historic agreement which merged the processing of Circuit Court domestic relations matters with juvenile matters previously heard in Probate Court.*

*The Michigan Supreme Court approved our operating plan (Joint Operating Agreement) in June and the new "Family Division" became operational on January 1, 1998.*

*The goal of this new division is "one judge, one family," and a concerted effort will be made to provide quality services to families in a court system that is fair, accessible, expeditious, dignified and responsive.*

# OFFICE OF THE PROBATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR

## MESSAGE FROM THE PROBATE COURT ADMINISTRATOR



*Robert L. Bingham*  
*Probate Court Administrator*

### "THE FAMILY DIVISION"

A key development in the structuring of the Family Division model in Oakland County was the assignment of Probate Judges to the new division. In November, Chief Circuit Judge Edward Sosnick and Chief Probate Judge Eugene Arthur Moore announced that Probate Judges Wendy Potts and Eugene Arthur Moore would be assigned to the Family Division on a full-time basis. It was also announced that Probate Judge Sandra Silver would hold a joint assignment with half of her time devoted to the Family Division and the other half remaining with Probate Court. The Hon. Barry M. Grant would continue his duties and responsibilities as Probate Judge within the Probate Court on a full-time basis.

Effective January 1, 1998, the Family Division maintains jurisdiction over the following matters and proceedings:

- Divorce and ancillary matters
- Adoptions
- Name changes
- Juvenile delinquency
- Child abuse and neglect
- Cases involving the status of minors and the emancipation of minors
- Child custody cases
- Paternities
- Child support under the Revised Uniform Reciprocal Enforcement of Support Act
- Personal protection orders
- Minor guardianships

Through enactment of Senate Bill 1052 and related legislation and as indicated in the 1996 Annual Report, Michigan's Probate and Circuit Courts were scheduled for significant organizational change commencing January 1, 1998. This legislative mandate challenged the Probate and Circuit Courts to create a new Family Division within the Circuit Court. SB 1052 charged the Chief Circuit Judge and Chief Probate Judge to establish an organizational structure and functional plan for the Family Division's operation by July 1, 1997. On acceptance of this interim joint operating agreement by the Michigan Supreme Court, the Family Division of the Circuit Court was scheduled to begin operations on January 1, 1998. Due to the breadth and complexity of the mandate, organizational and planning meetings to create an efficient and functional plan for the new Family Division dominated the administrative calendar in 1997.

Not only did this process regularly involve Probate and Circuit Court Judges and personnel, but input and advice was also sought from the Oakland County Executive Departments of Personnel, Management and Budget, Information Technology, Circuit Court Probation, Facilities Management, Community Corrections, Health and Human Services, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, the Oakland County Clerk's Office, the Oakland County Prosecuting Attorney, the Family Independence Agency, the Oakland County Sheriff's Department, the Oakland County Bar Association, the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, and Oakland Livingston Legal Aid.

The quality of the Oakland County model is directly attributed to the visionary leadership of the Honorable Edward Sosnick, Chief Circuit Judge, and the Honorable Eugene Arthur Moore, Chief Probate Judge. Not only did Chief Judges Sosnick and Moore mobilize and direct judges and dozens of court personnel to create and design the Oakland County model, but they set an example for collaboration and cooperation throughout the process.

To appreciate the enormity of the planning effort, dozens of critical issues were addressed including: organizational structure and reporting mechanisms, number of judges needed for assignment to the Family Division, utilization of referees, docketing and case reassignments, confidentiality, responsibility and location for filing of cases, automation, personnel and budget actions, coordination of services, forms, court rules, training, etc.

To administer and operate the Family Division model in Oakland County, it was determined that the majority of the Probate Court's personnel would be assigned to the Family Division under the administrative supervision of the Chief Circuit Judge, however, the hiring, disciplining, and discharging of Probate Court employees would continue to remain the responsibility of the Chief Probate Judge, as provided by law.

Remaining Probate Court personnel would continue to administer and process Probate Estates and Mental Health operations. Furthermore, it was recommended that the Probate Court administrator position be eliminated in favor of development of an interim Family Division Administrator responsible for Family Division operations and a permanent Probate Register to administer Probate Estates/Mental Health responsibilities.

While Family Division planning efforts clearly dominated the Probate Court administrative workplace in 1997, the processing of cases before the court and the delivery of the Probate Court's multiple services continued to be provided in an efficient and timely manner. This extraordinary effort on the part of Probate Court employees further exemplifies their ongoing commitment and value to court operations. Unit and divisional accomplishments were many and will be documented throughout this report.

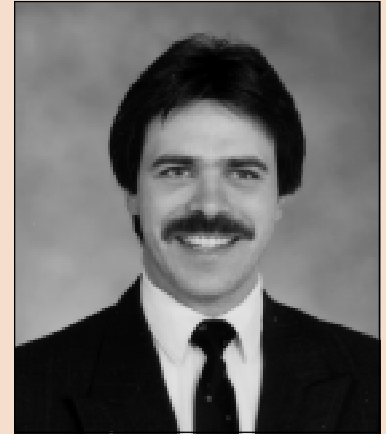
# JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION DIVISION

## ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT DIVISIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

This division is responsible for the development and delivery of administrative support services for the entire Probate Court. Administrative support services include the development and monitoring of the Court's \$21.0 million budget, preparing and monitoring the \$14.9 million child care fund budget, processing and monitoring charges for youth committed to the Family Independence Agency per Public Acts 150 and 220, processing payments including all court appointed attorney payments, personnel management and development, facilities management, information management, public relations, advancing Court automation and technology improvements, providing legal services, and providing data entry and word processing support which includes the typing of Court documents necessary for the functioning of the Court (i.e., court reports, psychological reports, referee reports).

## DIVISIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ❑ Directed and coordinated the acquisition of 90 new personal computers for use within various units of court operation, with the help of Oakland County's Information Technology Department. All employees of Probate Court are now equipped with personal computers, with the exception of Youth Assistance, which is scheduled for installation in April 1998.
- ❑ Assisted with the acquisition and implementation of a new BarCode/File Tracking system (Image Trax). This system has proven successful and beneficial in locating and tracking files throughout the Court.
- ❑ Attended Court Technology Conference (CTC5) at the Cobo Hall Conference Center in Detroit.
- ❑ Developed new and improved Court Appointed Attorney Payment System with an application in ACCESS, to replace the old mainframe System. Processed over 6,000 payments in 1997 to court appointed attorneys.
- ❑ Developed new Delinquency Pending Case Age Inventory Report for more effective caseload management tracking.
- ❑ Developed Central Registry for all Probate Court legal research projects. This enhancement will serve as an excellent reference tool so that analysis is not duplicated in the future.
- ❑ Produced 26,253 pages of Court documents in our Word Processing Center. Almost 9,500 dictations were received and transcribed on our new computerized digital dictation system.
- ❑ Generated \$102,300 in alternative sources of funds to support Court programs and services.
- ❑ Coordinated and presented the "Removing the Mysteries of Probate Court" seminar for Oakland County citizens at five different locations: Ferndale, Farmington, Pontiac, Rochester, and Milford. This free seminar provides information and answers on issues related to wills, estates, trusts, guardianships, and conservatorships. Over 1,000 people attended the seminars.
- ❑ Assisted in the planning and implementation of major county/court initiatives, i.e., New Human Resource and Financial System (HRFIS), creation of the Family Division of Circuit Court, Supreme Court's mandated Report of Audited Accounts Receivable, the Trial Court Assessment Commission Time Study, and the Children's Docket project.
- ❑ Comprehensive monitoring of juveniles committed to the State of Michigan FIA produced over \$60,000 in credit adjustments for Oakland County in 1997.



*John L. Cooperrider*  
*Deputy Court Administrator*

### "THE SAWDUST FINALLY FLIES"

After two years of planning, the Board of Commissioners unanimously approved Probate Court's Capital Improvement Project on April 10, 1997.

With the assistance of the Department of Facilities Management personnel, we were able to design a plan to increase the size of two existing courtrooms and provide relief to overcrowded conditions on the first floor.

In addressing these areas of concern, facility alterations for this project will be performed in phases specifically aimed at improving court operations for our judges, our staff, and the public. These seven phases for improvements are outlined below.

1. Remodel West Wing Extension (1st floor) for Youth Assistance administrative staff (complete June 1997).
2. Remodel ex-Youth Assistance area (2nd floor) for Court Administration (complete August 1997).
3. Remodel ex-Court Administration area (2nd floor) and create new courtroom and chambers for Judge Hallmark (complete January 1998).
4. Remodel Judge Hallmark's ex-courtroom and chambers area (1st floor) for Judge Silver's new courtroom and chamber's area (target May 1998).
5. Remodel Judge Silver's ex-courtroom and chamber's area (1st floor) for increased public waiting area, new Mental Health office, and new detention area (target August 1998).
6. Remodel ex-Mental Health office, detention, and Estates office area (1st floor) to relieve overcrowded Estate's unit (target December 1998).
7. Remodel Judge Moore and Judge Grant's courtrooms.

# JUDICIAL SUPPORT DIVISION



**William P. Bartlam**  
**Deputy Court Administrator**

## "REALLOCATING OUR CASES: GETTING FROM THERE TO HERE"

Implementing the Family Division plan meant review of 24,000 plus cases and determining which judge would hear them in the future. Case reassignment was the mechanism we used to get judicial dockets from "there to here."

We distinguished in reassignment between "pending" cases (awaiting trial), "open" cases (being actively supervised), and "dormant" cases. To help reduce the number of pending (unresolved) cases, we targeted about 150 of them, scheduled a "Settlement Week" during November and used the Oakland Mediation Center, private attorney facilitators, and court staff to meet with the parties and craft solutions. When we could not resolve a case, we gave the matter an early trial date. By this approach, we brought the number of "pending" cases to a minimum before we began reassignment, and in nearly 75% of the cases targeted for Settlement Week, we resolved the matter.

For most of the "open" cases, we will reassign them the next time a judge must make a decision in the case. For the majority of these matters, reassignment will occur sometime in the next 12 months. This approach permits our staff to reassign cases in the ordinary course of business, with minimum disruption to everyday routines. We handled two categories of "open" cases differently: 1,600 plus minor guardianships and a similarly-sized group of juvenile delinquency and child neglect cases were reallocated among all of the Family Division judges to bring a balance in dockets, so each judge would have a similar allocation of each type of case.

A large group of cases are dormant; the file has not been "closed," but there is no foreseeable judicial activity. We will not reassign these cases unless a judge needs to act. At some point, the case will no longer be open and reassignment will not be an issue any more.

## JUDICIAL SUPPORT DIVISIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

This division supports the "judicial" functions of the Probate Judges through scheduling, file preparation, record maintenance, and order production services. Support staff receive, maintain, and act upon documents which are presented to the court each day and update the computer records on all cases within Probate Court jurisdiction. Referees assist the judges by conducting many of the Juvenile Court hearings and recommending decisions to the judges in these cases. Court Reporters create records of courtroom proceedings and produce transcripts. Court Service Officers deliver summons, subpoenas, writs, and orders. The Assignment Clerk coordinates judge and referee assignments to all new matters, changes of venue, visiting judge requests and judge disqualification as well as the scheduling of many hearings. Staff within this division also handle hundreds of incoming phone calls each day as well as assisting the large number of users who are present for hearings or utilizing our counter services for filing documents or inspecting records.

Judicial Support functions cover all subject areas within Probate Court jurisdiction, and they are separately described within the Estates, Mental Health, Juvenile, and Adoption units.

## DIVISIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ❑ Planned and successfully operated Probate Court's first-ever "Settlement Week" and achieved a remarkable level of case resolution (see sidebar).
- ❑ Re-established a working relationship with the County Prosecutor's Office through regular meetings and exchanges of information. Representatives from the Court and from the Prosecutor's Warrants, Juvenile, and Case Records Divisions examined in detail the entire process of moving a case through the juvenile justice system to identify bottlenecks and simplify the mechanisms. This project continues in 1998.
- ❑ Established a work group with representatives of the County Clerk to detail the transfer of record-keeping responsibilities for Adoption, Juvenile, Emancipation, Change of Name, and Parental Consent Bypass cases. In a series of fall meetings, we reached agreement on filing points, bar coding, document processing, computer entry codes, and the many intricacies of the record-keeping process.
- ❑ Implemented procedures and trained staff on the Juvenile Justice Reform laws which became effective January 1, 1997. This legislation changed the manner in which juveniles were charged, tried, and sentenced, and in addition contained special provisions for lineups, jailing, escapes from facilities and in handling cases where dangerous weapons were used.
- ❑ Contributed to the implementation of the "Order for Accessing Records and Confidential Materials" following Supreme Court approval. This Administrative Order was developed by a cross-divisional work group, and Judicial Support staff assisted in user training, implementation of internal procedures, screening of requests, and setting up the varying levels of record security consistent with this order.
- ❑ Developed and implemented the process for assigning new matters, reassigning existing ones, and providing for new probate motion call processes as the court workload is divided with the advent of the Family Division.
- ❑ Assumed the responsibility for referee screening of Personal Protection Order requests before these requests are presented to judges for action. The 3,000 plus requests each year will be reviewed both for legal sufficiency and appropriateness. Referee training was completed in November 1997 and the responsibility was operationalized on December 1.



# JUDICIAL SUPPORT DIVISION

## JUVENILE/ADOPTION SUPPORT UNIT RESPONSIBILITIES

The Juvenile/Adoption Support unit is composed of six work areas responsible for the delivery of judicial support services in the juvenile and adoption jurisdictional arenas. The *Intake* work area processes and reviews the complaints at the front-end of the system. The *Deputy Register* work area processes the delinquency and child protective proceeding files as they move through the system and are authorized for formal court. The *Traffic* work area processes complaints of juveniles committing violations of the Motor Vehicle Code that are criminal violations. The *Victim's Rights* work area provides a valuable service to the community by providing the necessary link between victims of juvenile crimes and the court. The *Adoptions* work area is responsible for processing inter-family, direct consent, and agency adoption petitions. Finally, the *Court Service Officers* area is responsible for service delivery of court legal documents according to court rules, i.e., summonses, subpoenas, bench warrants, etc.

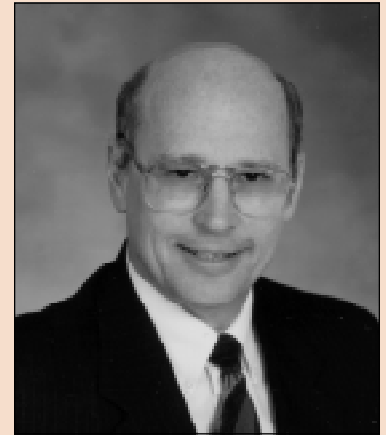
Each work area is responsible for reviewing and processing all complaints and petitions for completeness and accuracy of information. Referees guided by statute, court rules, and court policies determine the level of court intervention necessary to handle each complaint. Each work area supports the judicial process by performing record checks on juveniles, entering pertinent information into the computer database, responding to inquires from police or the public at large, performing file preparation and record maintenance, and producing court orders.

## UNIT HIGHLIGHTS

- ❑ Processed 487 petitions within the Adoption unit, an increase of nearly 23% over 1996. The largest increase was in stepparent petitions which increased by over 34%.
- ❑ Served, or attempted to serve 14,925 legal documents, such as subpoenas, summons, and show causes; an increase of 6.5% over 1996.
- ❑ Received 800 traffic citations and forwarded a total of 837 abstracts to the Secretary of State, of which 572 were for various delinquent offenses. (Based on recent legislation, various delinquent offenses impact the juvenile's driver's license even when the offense is not a driving offense, for example, minor in possession of alcohol.)
- ❑ Received 7,664 complaints in Intake and completed processing of 6,570 complaints. This includes delinquency, child protection, and various supplemental petitions. Nearly 55% of the complaints were unofficially closed.
- ❑ Continue to convert various typed Intake form letters to computer generated.
- ❑ Processed the first designated juvenile offender case under the Juvenile Justice Reform legislation. This provides the prosecutor the opportunity to charge a youth of any age.
- ❑ With the introduction of two new referees in May assigned to the Intake function, the average number of conferences grew to 77 per month for the last six months of the year compared to 27 during the first half of the year. Based on cases resolved during the last four months of the year, 363 of those cases had conferences scheduled.



*Martin B. Alvin*  
Senior Referee



*Charles A. Ludwig*  
Chief of Juvenile/Adoption Support

"IT COULD BE..."

Our 1997 highlight could be the implementation of the special docket to address smoking violations at Intake. *It could be* the full implementation of the computer generated disposition sheets by the Deputy Registers. *It could be* the continued cultivation of procedures for filing adoption petitions by the Adoption unit. *It could be* the sensitive handling of the public by the Court Desk or the Call Director for their responsibility in the policy to respond to the deaf, hard of hearing, and non-English speaking public or the added obligation by the Court Desk to monitor the public copy machine. *It could be* the participation of the File Room in that bar coding project; the Court Service Officers serving 14,925 documents. Perhaps *it could be* the continual effort of the Order Clerks to promptly distribute court orders. *It could be* the efforts to prepare for the implementation of the Family Division of the Circuit Court?

To recognize one of these *it could be* highlights ignores the others and the entire unit's contribution. Although every year brings on changes of one sort or another, the changes of 1997 pale prior years.

The highlight for 1997 can only be the consistent dedication, work effort, and commitment from the personnel assigned to the Juvenile/Adoption units of Judicial Support. From the unit supervisors to the students, their efforts never faltered. Change is a constant and 1997 it was overwhelming. We can only meet change if we define it as a challenge to be overcome. We have. *That is our highlight.*

# JUDICIAL SUPPORT DIVISION



*Lisa Symula*  
*Chief of Estate/Mental*  
*Health Support*

## "FOCUS ON TECHNOLOGY"

As in 1996, our focus was on technology. We have continued acquiring personal computers for staff with an emphasis on placing all Probate Court forms onto the computers. This is a very ambitious project which will be ongoing for several months.

Our unit was also part of an Oakland County initiative to implement a new cash receipting system. This system allows for automatic account totals to be computed and reported directly to Oakland County Treasurer's office. This saves countless staff hours in manual computations.

Perhaps our most ambitious project was the development and installation of our new automated barcode/file tracking system. This process began in May 1996 with the decision by the Probate Court to allocate funds for a file tracking system. A great deal of effort was put into the bid and selection process, and ultimately a vendor was chosen. In May 1997, crews of up to 70 worked an entire weekend, manually placing barcode labels on all of our existing Estates, Mental Health, DDP, and Juvenile files (over 180,000 files). Software was installed and on May 5, 1997, on-site use began. The benefit to the Court has been impressive. At any given time, a file can be scanned and its exact location can be determined instantly. This has saved countless hours of file searching and its many benefits can be seen by the entire Probate Court and users of our system.

Our emphasis on technology issues continues to better serve our staff and community.

## ESTATES AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT UNIT RESPONSIBILITIES

### ESTATES PROCEEDINGS

Probate Court performs one of the most important functions of courts in society -- they make a formal record of the legal status of property. Probate Court supervises both the "probating" of wills and the administration of estates and trusts of deceased persons by personal representatives. It is the court's task to interpret last wills in the event of uncertainty or conflict over the will's meaning or to determine rights to an estate (where the deceased person has died "intestate," or without a will). Staff of this unit are responsible for processing all documents relating to decedent estates, guardianships, and conservatorship of adults and minors, inter vivos and testamentary trusts, change of names, inheritance tax matters, and acknowledgments of paternity. The unit also provides for the safekeeping of wills. A probate file room houses all files related to this unit's work. As probate information is a matter of public record, file room staff are responsible for filing, retrieving, and maintaining these records accurately and promptly.

### MENTAL HEALTH PROCEEDINGS

Probate Court holds Mental Health hearings as prescribed within the Mental Health Code pertaining to commitment for hospital care of alleged mentally ill persons, mentally handicapped, and addicted persons. Staff of this unit are responsible for the processing of petitions for the judicial admission of mentally ill persons to psychiatric facilities. The unit is also responsible for reporting procedures relative to developmentally disabled persons.

### UNIT HIGHLIGHTS

- ❑ Assisted with the formation and implementation of the new Circuit Court Family Division. Many of these changes had a direct impact on Probate Court operations, particularly in the area of records management. We congratulate and thank the entire staff of the Probate Court for managing this change and keeping their sense of humor and purpose intact.
- ❑ Planned and instituted Probate Court's first ever Settlement Week which was a great success, settling over 70% of the targeted cases.
- ❑ Produced and completed several invaluable resource materials, including a "resource book" which holds all forms that are used and gives information to staff and/or public. An index of the staff meeting minutes was also completed, which again will be used by staff and supervision on almost a daily basis.
- ❑ Modified and revised forms used in our Delinquency (717) area. This work unit sends out notices to fiduciaries who are delinquent in filing accounts and other paperwork. Forms were completed with the help of Oakland County's Information Technology Department to streamline workflow and provide clear information to the public.
- ❑ Continued to receive new personal computers and associated training for all staff.
- ❑ Assisted in developing floor plans for our Capital Improvement Project, our long awaited "facelift," which will provide to us more efficient counter and staff areas.