

# Probate and Circuit Courts Recognize Employees of the Year

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**A**t our annual Employee of the Year Awards Ceremony in December, the Probate and Circuit courts recognized five employees for outstanding contributions to the courts, their constituents and the citizens of Oakland County.

Every year the employees of the courts are invited to nominate colleagues, subordinates and supervisors who go beyond their normal duties and responsibilities because of their inherent commitment to excellence. About 30 employees were nominated, each of whom was recognized for their contributions and dedicated public service. Of these, five were selected as our Employees of the Year in recognition of work and conduct that far exceeds expectations. We take great pride in introducing our Employees of the Year.

**Debbie Lindsey** – Debbie serves as a Youth Assistance Caseworker 2 at the Lakes Area Youth Assistance Office in Walled Lake. She has been with the court on a full-time basis since 1998, although she did serve on a part-time basis going back to 1989.

Youth Assistance is a community-based program designed to strengthen kids and their families and to reduce the likelihood of delinquency, abuse and neglect through community involvement. Debbie assists in mobilizing a network of community resources including school and community officials, local law enforcement, and other community interests to develop services for kids and families to control, treat, eliminate and prevent delinquency, abuse and neglect.

Debbie handles her duties thoughtfully and with attention to detail. She is hardworking and possesses a passion for youth. During the holiday season in 2006, the Lakes Area Youth Assistance program sponsored a toy drive for needy children. The day before the toys were to be picked up, a pipe burst in Debbie's office, soaking the carefully wrapped toys. Debbie and some of her colleagues spent hours that evening re-wrapping gifts so that they could be ready for pick-up the next morning. No one would be surprised that Debbie would take time out of her schedule to help these kids because she demonstrates such a commitment each day.

**Libby Blanchard** – Libby serves as a Friend of the Court referee, a position she has held since 2002.

The Friend of the Court conducts investigations and makes recommendations regarding custody, parenting time and child support. Libby is responsible for enforcing court orders regarding child support, custody and parenting time. She

reviews complaints, conducts Orders to Show Cause hearings for non-payment of child support, interviews clients and reviews investigative reports to prepare recommendations.

Some people tolerate their jobs ... Libby embraces hers. She is committed to helping ease the stress and burden of divorce, with a passion to ensure that the welfare and needs of the kids are paramount when making recommendations with respect to custody, parenting time and financial support.

Her commitment to the welfare and needs of constituents goes beyond the job. Libby actively supports the Mentors Plus program by serving as a volunteer for Bloomfield Youth Guidance, where Libby provides at-risk youth with a "one-on-one" mentoring relationship with a caring adult. Caring and commitment – attributes that aptly describe the way Libby performs her job and gives of her free time to help others.

**Cass Morgan** – Cass serves as an Office Assistant II in the Probate Court. He began working full time for the county in October 2000 as an employee of the Facilities, Maintenance & Operations division and moved to the Probate Court in February 2001.

The Probate Court has jurisdiction over a variety of case types, including decedent estates, trusts, conservatorships, guardianships, mental health commitments and developmentally disabled persons. One of Cass's primary responsibilities with the court is to provide customer service in the guardianship/conservatorship and developmentally disabled areas. Cass also has experience in the mental health area and occasionally assists in that unit.

In order to assist customers, Cass's job requires him to have an in-depth knowledge of multiple filing requirements and court procedures. The position requires patience, accuracy and attention to detail, all of which Cass demonstrates daily.

A majority of parties who access the Probate Court are dealing with very difficult issues; for example, the death of someone in their life, the mental illness of a family member, or a loved one's inability to make life decisions. Cass provides assistance that is compassionate and efficient, helping the customer manage difficult issues as easily as possible. Cass also goes above and beyond to assist his co-workers on a daily basis by helping with extra workload, assisting with demanding assignments, and simply pitching in where help is needed. He provides a sense of humor

**2007 Employee of the Year Award Ceremony** – Front row: Libby Blanchard, Chris Bujak, Cass Morgan, Deborah Goltz, Deborah Lindsey. Middle row: Judge Cheryl Matthews, Judge Shalina Kumar, Judge Steven Andrews. Back row: Chief Judge Wendy Potts, Judge Eugene Arthur Moore, Chief Judge Barry Grant.



and calm cooperation that serve to make a challenging day easier for those he works with.

**Debbie Goltz** – Debbie serves as the judicial secretary for the Honorable Steven N. Andrews. Debbie joined Judge Andrews' staff in 2005, but she was no stranger to the court having served as a substitute judicial secretary for more than 10 years prior to her appointment.

Debbie's typical day consists of performing confidential secretarial duties for her judge; keeping his schedule; answering inquiries from court personnel, the media, litigants, attorneys and the public; and assisting in the management and coordination of the chambers to ensure that operations are orderly and efficient.

Debbie is a model of organization and professionalism. She possesses an affection for her job, judge, colleagues, and others with whom she interacts daily that is clearly evident in how she conducts herself and performs her duties. It seems that she performs her duties effortlessly, yet with great care and precision. She has it down to a science, and is eager to assist others when the need arises.

Debbie recently offered to assist a new judicial secretary through training and mentoring. She developed a "how-to" guidebook covering many of the tasks that a judicial secretary performs each day. The guidebook was so well done that it could serve as a model for other employees who have the opportunity to serve as mentors. In addition, Debbie volunteered to provide much-needed input and advice on the rollout of our Real-Time Judgments of Sentence program, whereby the judgments are produced "real-time" in the courtroom during sentencing, with copies provided to attorneys, defendants, deputies and other relevant persons before they leave the courtroom. Debbie's assistance in eliciting "buy-in" and turning an idea into reality was significant.

**Chris Bujak** – Chris Bujak is the Supervisor of the Data Technology Unit for the courts. She began working for the county in the Reimbursement Division in 1998 and moved to the courts in 2001. She was promoted to her current position in mid-2006.

The Data Technology Unit is responsible for technology issues for both the Circuit and Probate courts. Chris' contributions therefore involve a wide variety of projects. An example of her accomplishments would include her facilitation of the integration of technology into the courtroom with digital recording, overhead projection systems, and wireless Internet. Chris' assignment also includes duties such as reviewing business processes and developing alternative ways of doing business with technology as the foundation for those changes.

Chris' contributions to the courts go well beyond the integration of technology. Her dedication to each project,

attention to detail and willingness to extend extra effort provide an extraordinary level of service to the judges, court staff and parties. Chris is constantly thinking of new and better ways to provide technology services, from improving the way clerks access information in the courtroom to getting Youth Assistance satellite offices onto dedicated network connections. Her contributions have served to extensively move the courts toward the productive integration of technology.

As administrators, we appreciate the fact that the courts' ability to carry out their essential functions is directly related to the dedicated, skilled and professional employees who work here. Many often labor in the background, but the fruits of their labor take center stage in helping the courts to fulfill their mission. We appreciate all of our employees and today we pay tribute to those who have been recognized by their peers as shining stars.

Until next time...

We are very pleased to note the Michigan Supreme Court's Chief Judge appointments for the Oakland County courts that became effective January 1, 2008. Judge Elizabeth Pezzetti has been appointed as the new chief judge for the Oakland County Probate Court. Judge Pezzetti was appointed to the Probate bench in 2001 and is also currently assigned to the Family Division. Judge Pezzetti has appointed Judge Barry M. Grant as Chief Judge Pro Tem, and Judge Eugene Arthur Moore as the Presiding Judge of the Estates Division.

Judge Wendy Potts was reappointed by the Supreme Court to the position of Chief Judge of the Sixth Judicial Circuit Court in Oakland County. This is the third consecutive two-year term in which she will serve as Chief Judge.

Judge Potts has served as a circuit judge since 1998. She served as a probate judge in Oakland County prior to her appointment to the Circuit bench.

Judge Potts has appointed Judge James M. Alexander as Chief Judge Pro Tem and Presiding Judge of the Family Division. She also appointed Judge Steven N. Andrews as Presiding Judge of the Civil/Criminal Division.