

New Developments

by Rebecca A. Schnelz
Probate Court Administrator



It's been a fast few months in my new position as the Oakland County Probate Court Administrator! Thank you to all who sent me their good wishes and congratulations. Thank you also to the many Oakland County staff members who have assisted in making the administrative transition as smooth as possible.

Welcome, Judge Bowman

The Probate Court is pleased to extend a very warm welcome to Judge Leo Bowman, who was recently appointed to the Oakland Circuit bench. We look forward to working with Judge Bowman, who will be handling some minor guardianships as part of his Family Court assignment. Welcome, Judge Bowman!

Organizational Changes

We've been making some organizational changes within the Estates and Mental Health Division. As a result, our four Probate Specialists are tackling some new challenges that will improve our services to the public and our ability to monitor fiduciary compliance.

As you may already know, the Estates and Mental Health Division was divided into three units a few years ago: Guardianships/Conservatorships, Estates/Trusts/Civil cases, and Mental Health. We've recently added a fourth unit that will include case flow, fiduciary compliance (a.k.a. "203") and computer (TCS) issues. Each unit has been assigned a Probate Specialist whose job it will be to monitor the workflow through the unit, assist in ensuring consistent training, and address some of the more complicated questions that arise on files.

Collectively, the Probate Specialists have about 50 years of experience in the Oakland County Probate Court. The reorganization will better utilize their combined experience and directly impact the quality of our services. The Specialists' new assignments are:

Brenda Gagnon – Case flow/203/TCS
Bridgett Ray – Mental Health/Developmentally Disabled
Vicki Spicer – Guardianships/Conservatorships
Kimberly Voss – Decedent Estates/Trusts/Civil
We'll keep you updated on further improvements as we move forward.

Basic Training for Conservators

This past summer, the Oakland County Probate Court began offering "Basic Training for Conservators." This monthly class is designed to provide court-appointed conservators the basic information they need to fulfill their statutorily mandated fiduciary obligations and to act in the best interests of the ward.

The class is co-sponsored by the Citizens Alliance for the Oakland County Probate and Circuit Courts. Attendance is free and participants are provided with a packet of detailed information, as well as completed samples of the forms with which they will need to become familiar. The session is taught by a local attorney, and a probate staff member is available for questions. Participants are advised that the attorney and staff member cannot provide legal advice.

"Basic Training for Conservators" is offered the first Wednesday of every month. The class begins at 11:00 a.m. in Judge Barry Grant's courtroom (1F), with a question-and-answer period at noon. Conservators are welcome to attend more than one session and the class is open to both newly appointed and currently serving conservators. The class is an excellent resource to consider for clients who may be struggling with their conservatorship duties. For additional information, including class dates, please visit our Web site at www.oakgov.com/probate/news.

The class has been very successful, in large part due to the efforts of attorney Mike Hughes, who has helped develop the training materials and is teaching the class as it gets up and running. Thank you, Mike!