

Removing the Mysteries of Probate Court

by *Lisa Langton*
Family Division Administrator -
Probate/Juvenile Register



There is such a thing as a free lunch! Since the early 1990s our Probate Court staff, in collaboration with Oakland County Citizens Alliance, has been holding lunchtime seminars called “Removing the Mysteries of Probate Court.” At the time, there was a lot of media attention on how to “avoid probate court” and many misconceptions surrounding the process and the purpose of probate court. Interestingly, we continue to have media attention on these issues. Recently, I saw a seminar whose purpose was to promote the use of trusts to seniors, and whose advertising included language such as “Don’t pay thousands of dollars in court fees” and “Avoid having your assets tied up in probate court for years.”

“Removing the Mysteries of Probate Court” continues to be an educational and very popular seminar even today. Simply put, this seminar is designed to educate our citizens on probate practices, laws, and the Oakland County Probate Court system in particular. The court cooperates with local senior groups to arrange these very well attended free seminars.

Jill Koney Daly, our Chief of Estates and Mental Health, leads these seminars and gives a very unbiased, informative presentation about the pitfalls of “avoiding probate court” and gives concise information about wills, trusts, powers of attorney (medical and financial), healthcare proxies, probating estates, guardianships and conservatorships, and she also attempts to ease the minds of those persons confused or apprehensive about the probate process. Given the years of feedback we have had about this presentation, I can also assure you that Jill keeps the seminar interesting with her many anecdotes and entertaining stories. It remains true that “you can’t make this stuff up!”

The seminar also has presentations from expert volunteer attorneys and trust officers who will answer questions and elaborate on the many services available in the particular community with respect to these areas. There is no hard sell to hire attorneys, sell form documents or any financial services from our volunteers.

The court provides various resource materials courtesy of local legislatures and our courts so that all the attendees have an opportunity to learn about these areas at their leisure.

At the conclusion of the seminar, ample time is given for questions. Some of these questions include:

- How “avoiding probate” could cause you problems during your lifetime.
- When do you need a will, trust and/or power of attorney?
- What does a personal representative need to know about probate estate administration?
- What happens if you don’t have a will?
- How do I become a guardian or conservator, and how are they handled by the court?

Each fall and spring the court schedules several seminars at local communities. Currently, three seminars are scheduled:

- Monday, October 3, 2005, at 920 On The Park in Troy, 1:00-3:30 p.m.
- Monday, October 24, 2005, at Madison Heights Senior Center, 1:00-3:30 p.m.
- Monday, November 14, 2005, Lake Orion Senior Center, 12:30-3:00 p.m.

If you know of an organization that would like to sponsor this seminar, please contact Marcia Travis at 248-858-0296. If you have any questions or if you would like more information about these seminars, please contact me at your convenience. Stay tuned!