

"The Way We Were"

by Hon. Edward Sosnick, Guest Columnist
Oakland County Circuit Court



This year when the ball drops at midnight in Times Square, my 28-year tenure as a district and circuit court judge will end. Although someone said I look younger, I will be 72 on December 23 and unable to run for re-election again due to mandatory age limits.

OAKLAND COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

*Do you have a concern regarding an
active matter before the court?*

*Joel Serlin, Oakland County Circuit
Court Ombudsman, may be able to help.*

The purpose of the program is to provide a discreet forum for the informal resolution of issues and matters in which there is no other established or preferred procedure to secure redress.

The Ombudsman is a neutral, vested with the authority to act as an intermediary between attorneys and judicial officers and other personnel.

Hallmarks of the program

Confidentiality | **Neutrality** | **Informality** | **Independence**

**Contact Ombudsman Joel Serlin
at (248) 353-7620**

For additional details about the ombudsman program visit the "Member News" section of the OCBA's website at www.ocba.org, or scan the QR code with your smartphone



Unlike the past 10 or so years, I intend to be awake at midnight this New Year's Eve. It has been a great run, and I feel blessed to have had such a long judicial career.

After four years as a judge in the 48th District Court, I was elected in 1988 to succeed retiring Oakland Circuit Judge James S. Thorburn. My six-year term began at midnight on January 1, 1989.

At that time, of the 14 Oakland Circuit judges, three were female – namely Judges Hilda Gage, Alice Gilbert and Jessica Cooper. In contrast, there are now 18 Oakland Circuit judges, with 12 of them female.

Although such a large feminine majority has called for some adjustments by our male judges, I have had no problem at all. My two little granddaughters, Jane and Estee, convinced me that pink was the best color, and my wife, Darlene, taught me to say "I'm sorry," even when I was right. Seriously, it has been a joy to be part of our past and current bench.

1989 saw newly elected President George H. W. Bush take office. Mikhail S. Gorbachev was named president of Russia and U.S. troops invaded Panama seeking capture of General Manuel Noriega.

Unemployment was at 5.3 percent and a first-class stamp cost 25 cents. The Super Bowl was held at the Pontiac Silverdome, where San Francisco defeated Cincinnati to win it. Michigan won the NCAA basketball championship and the Detroit Pistons beat the Lakers to become NBA champs.

1989 was also the first-ever retreat for the Oakland Circuit Court judges. I was very nervous in attending, as I held the members of the bench in awe, and wondered if I could ever call Judge Kuhn "Dick" or Judge Schnelz "Gene."

As the meeting progressed, I became more comfortable. A psychologist tested us that day and found that the late Judge David Breck and I were classified as "feelers." It took years of pretending to be tough to stop the relentless teasing.

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The years since 1989 have been filled with change, with 21 judges retiring during that period and the addition of 26 new judges during that same time period.

Jurisdiction went from over \$10,000 to over \$25,000. After a one-court video pilot project in 1989, video courtrooms have become the norm today. Technology has totally changed the way we operate. The age of computers, the Internet and social media have made us forget the IBM Correcting Selectric Typewriter.

Circuit Court mediation has now become case evaluation, and ADR has grown and is now an intricate part of our justice system. eFiling is on the rise and smartphones have changed the way we do business. Attorneys can review court dockets from the comfort of their offices and judges and court staff never have to pull a file to see the latest pleadings filed on a particular case.

Gone are the days of attorneys schlepping boxes of exhibits, photographs and diagrams into court. Laptops, PowerPoints, and tablets have superseded the boxes. Letters and phone calls have been replaced by emails and texts.

I must admit that the modern practices are in many ways more efficient and less time consuming, and allow for greater flexibility. Attorneys can easily stay in touch with

their clients and their office, and even make court appearances while vacationing in Timbuktu.

During my tenure, I served four years as chief judge, co-founded the SMILE program, presided over the Juvenile Drug Court for almost 10 years, and participated in the creation of the Family Division.

I have presided over more civil and criminal jury trials than I can recall, allowing me to be a witness to some great lawyering. I have often stated that real court is better than any reality show on television.

As I look back on the many changes over time, I feel so lucky to be part of it and, most of all, I am proud of the lawyers who practice in our court making sure our system of justice works.

I have had a great run! I will miss my colleagues, my staff and the lawyers I have known. Unlike "an old soldier," I do not intend to fade away. I will become Of Counsel to the law firm founded by my boyhood friend, Fred Steinhardt, now known as Steinhardt, Pesick & Cohen. Fred died of pancreatic cancer 12 years ago and my joining his firm was our long-standing plan.

Finally, as the ball drops at midnight, I hope those of you who are awake will think of me as I think of you. I hope our paths will cross often in the coming years.

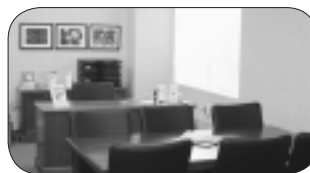
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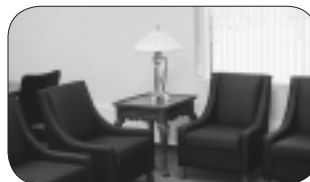
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