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Judge looks forward to new role as chief

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By ANN ZANIEWSKI
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Nanci Grant's eyes light up when she talks about being a judge.

"I love my job," she said.

After presiding over thousands of cases in her 13 years on the circuit bench, Grant has taken on a new role — chief circuit judge.

The Michigan Supreme Court appointed Grant to the position late last year. Her two-year term began Jan. 1.

The chief circuit judge has the authority to make court appointments, initiate policies, supervise court finances and take on other administrative duties, in addition to presiding over cases. Oakland Circuit Judge Wendy Potts previously held the chief position for three consecutive terms.

Grant said her No. 1 priority is tackling the budget issues facing the court. As declining property tax revenues have impacted all areas of the county, Oakland County Circuit Court has cut \$6 million from its budget since 2003 and is operating under a three-year budget that includes another \$4 million in reductions.

"Both the judges and the support staff really want what's best for the public," Grant said. "I think we're all very creative and very intelligent in terms of looking for different ways to further reduce costs without reducing services.

"This is a strong bench, and we're all in this together," she said.

Grant was born and raised in Oakland County. She received her Juris Doctor degree from Wayne State University Law School and worked in private practice prior to her 1996 election.

Grant and her husband, attorney Mark Frankel, have two sons. Her father, Barry Grant, served on Oakland County's probate bench from 1977 through 2008.

"I've had a really good mentor," Grant said.

Grant said she always remains cognizant of the impact that her decisions have on other people's lives.

When a young person appears in her courtroom, Grant passes along a crucial lesson: Surround yourself with good people, and don't hang out with troublemakers. She is passionate about trying to convince teens to make sound decisions and keep their lives on the right track.

On her desk in the courtroom, Grant keeps a piece of paper with the name of a high school junior who appeared before her on charges of larceny from a vehicle. He returned to her court after a probationary period to report that her advice made a difference: He had completed volunteer work with community outreach programs, improved his grades, was more respectful of his parents and had goals of going to college and becoming a firefighter.

"He kind of gives me hope," Grant said, adding she was pleased for him because he realized that his own decisions have an impact on other people.

Longtime defense attorney Lawrence Kaluzny said Grant will make a great chief judge.

"I just think she's been a very fair judge," he said. "I like her as a person, and I like the fact that she listens, and she'll do what she thinks is right."

Grant has been active in the judicial field at the state level, serving as secretary of the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission and past president of the Michigan Judges Association.

With her appointment as chief judge, she is looking forward to getting even more involved at the circuit level.

"It's a new challenge," she said, "and I'm ready to accept a new challenge."

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