

Circuit, district courts require voters' decisions

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FOR THE SAGINAW NEWS

MIDLAND — Midland County voters will make a judgment call in two judicial races on the Tuesday, Nov. 7, ballot.

Steve Durance and Jon Lauderbach hope to fill an opening on the Midland County Circuit Court bench, while District Judge Robert L. Donoghue faces challenger Steve Carras.

Probate Judge Dorene S. Allen is unopposed as she seeks a second six-year term.

42nd Circuit Court

As the top two vote-getters in the August primary, Durance and Lauderbach are battling for a six-year term. Lauderbach came through with 5,125 votes; Durance, with 4,900.

Durance's campaign has emphasized Midland as a "special place that takes special experience." The attorney touts his 20 years of experience in the circuit, district and probate courts.

"I have the ability to cover the spectrum," said Durance, 44. "When I tell people the varied duties of the judge, eyes glaze over, but I know my business."

As a past member of the Midland Child Protection Council and former assistant county prosecuting attorney, Durance said the courts "need to use all the resources, support groups, agencies and individuals in the community to support children, families and parents."

Lauderbach, an attorney with Currie Kendall in Midland, points to his work in courtrooms in three dozen counties, from Traverse City to Detroit, allowing him "to experience lots of different judges and styles."

"Judges must work hard and render prompt decisions," said Lauderbach, 37. "They must work in an evenhanded manner, treating all with respect. Finally judges must understand and respect their role to apply, not make, the law."

An assistant attorney general and member of the board for the Midland Area Chamber of Commerce, he is campaigning around the city and has attended township board meetings.

"I am paying attention to voters outside the city, too. Sixteen of the 16 township supervisors have endorsed my candidacy as judge," he said.

Lauderbach is a graduate of Albion College and received his law degree from the University of Detroit School of Law. Durance is a graduate of Valparaiso University with a law degree from University of Detroit Mercy.

75th District Court

Appointed in 2005, Donoghue faces Carras for a term expiring in 2011. The two were the top vote-getters in a three-way primary, with Carras collecting 5,222 votes and Donoghue receiving 4,614.

Donoghue said he has brought his 31 years of experience from criminal matters to probate questions to the bench.

"I am an experienced trial lawyer with over 4,000 criminal cases, divorce, bankruptcy and probate before judges. My opponent says he specializes in probate and estate cases, but District Court sees 98.5 percent criminal matters," Donoghue said.

Donoghue previously was supervisor for law enforcement for the state Department of Corrections and a probation and parole officer for the U.S. District Court.

"I have knowledge of the people who appear in court and of their problems," said Donoghue, 61.

To combat crowding at the Midland County Jail, Donoghue said he has used sentences involving tethers and extensively reviewed progress on probation to reduce recidivism.

Carras has represented clients in all three courts from divorce and child custody to juvenile delinquency and landlord/tenant disputes in a decade of legal experience.

"My philosophy in sentencing is first to keep Midland safe by making sure people who are a danger remain in jail, and second to reduce repeat offending by using (such) alternative methods as electronic tether, treatment programs and outpatient and educational programs," he said.

Carras, 37, is a native Midlander and chairman of the advisory board for the Alden B. Dow Museum of Science & Art. He is in private practice.

Donoghue is a graduate of Central Michigan University and Cooley Law School in Lansing.

A graduate of Michigan State University, Carras received his law degree from the University of Detroit Mercy and a master's degree in taxation from Wayne State University Law School.

Probate Court

Voters elected Allen in 2001. Alone on the ballot, she is a shoo-in to keep the job.

Allen, 52, recently became chief judge of the Circuit Court, a groundbreaking appointment for a probate judge statewide. The title means she has administrative responsibilities and statutory duties for the Circuit Court. ❖

The **0/6** Vote