

## WOODHAVEN: Court hires firm to go after those with outstanding fines

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By Jackie Harrison-Martin

WOODHAVEN — Defendants who are missing in action when it comes to paying their fines, costs and fees to 33rd District Court might find this message from a collection agency soon: "Pay your bill."

Judges James Kersten, Michael McNally and Edward Nykiel recently announced that the court has entered into an agreement with Capital Recovery Systems Inc. to collect outstanding debts on cases dating back to 2003.

The Columbus, Ohio-based company specializes in court collections.

The company has contracts with more than 350 courts in Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Florida and West Virginia. This is the first contract with a Michigan court.

With the I-75 Detroit-to-Toledo, Ohio, corridor running through the jurisdiction, many of the fines were levied against people who don't live in Michigan.

Peg Krizan, court administrator, took note of the company at a conference and saw that it goes after defendants from many of the areas that would be beneficial to the court, especially Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana residents.

A representative from the agency spoke to all three judges, and the company's references were checked.

The company is expected to receive about 500 collections cases from the court.

Once a case is 56 days past due, a 20 percent delinquent fee is added to the bill.

The company will receive that 20 percent delinquent fee from each successful case as payment.

Fines run from \$65 for seat belt infractions to \$240 for commercial motor vehicle tickets.

Last year, about \$3.7 million in fines were assessed, and about \$342,000 remained outstanding by the end of the year, Krizan said. In 2003, \$5 million in fines were assessed, and about \$133,000 remained outstanding by the end of that year.

This year, 32 percent of all assessed fines have not been paid.

Krizan said money owed beyond that time frame will be exceptionally difficult to recoup.

The arrangement is part of the court's increased efforts to collect from those defendants who have ignored their obligations.

"The court has been very successful in efforts to collect outstanding fines and costs from Michigan residents," Kersten said. "We are now turning to collection experts to track down the residents of other states who are indebted to the 33rd District Court."

Krizan said the court has beaten to death the cases from the early years trying to collect on delinquent fines, costs and fees. She said if the court orders defendants to pay, that's exactly what they should do.

Each defendant's credit report will be targeted if a bill is not paid.

The court serves Brownstown Township, Flat Rock, Gibraltar, Grosse Ile Township, Rockwood, Trenton and Woodhaven.

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