

JUDGE WENDY POTTS

Judge Wendy Potts' Distinguished Career Is More Than Just 'Business as Usual'

"The job is challenging, but it's wonderful. Be patient and enjoy the opportunity to serve."

These are the words of wisdom Oakland County Circuit Judge Wendy Potts has for her colleagues as she prepares to retire this year. It's advice that she has clearly taken to heart throughout a career spanning more than 20 years. Ever since her appointment to the circuit bench in 1997, Judge Potts has successfully presided over a wide variety of cases — ranging from criminal to civil to business-related litigation — and established a reputation as a determined and resilient problem-solver.

When asked which part of her career she has found the most fulfilling, Judge Potts remarked, "The most rewarding thing is seeing a criminal defendant who's gotten in trouble, but successfully completes probation and turns their life around."

But Oakland County Circuit Court's business docket also holds a special place in her heart.

"I think the idea of being part of something from the ground up, and creating something, was something I was very interested in. I wanted to become a specialist in an area," she shared.

Judge Potts lauds the business court as a way for assigned judges to become familiar with a unique form of litigation, as well as gain invaluable experience working with complex, specialized issues.



Judge Potts

And specialize she did — from the advent of Oakland County's business docket in 2013 to now, Judge Potts has periodically met with a business court advisory committee comprised of "top-notch business lawyers," collaborated with many other business court judges through the State Court Administrative Office, and constantly worked to "refine the methods of handling cases."

Indeed, one of the most memorable cases of Judge Potts' career is business related.

"The case that's stuck in my mind most vividly is when I was faced with the Northland Mall receivership," she recalled. "Growing up, I often went to the Northland Mall, and I loved it. The next thing I know, I'm here and they're in financial trouble, so a receiver had to be appointed."



Unfortunately, the receiver — whom Judge Potts describes as “a court-appointed individual that basically attempts to run the entity and pay its bills” — was ultimately unsuccessful, and Judge Potts’ childhood mall was forced to come down.

However, Judge Potts’ tireless efforts to better her community haven’t stopped at the bench. During the past 20 years, she has been involved in a variety of organizations aimed at improving the lives of Oakland County’s most vulnerable, including the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council and the Child Abuse and Neglect Council. She also formed the RESTORE Foundation to combat issues such as drug abuse and youth suicide and relieve pressure from Oakland County’s underfunded drug courts.

“In order to keep those courts afloat, we needed to find a mechanism to assist them,” she explained. “So RESTORE was formed, and we were able to get them through their tough times.”

In addition to serving the court and her community, Judge Potts has also served as a trustee in the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society, whose main purpose is to preserve Michigan’s legal heritage.

“It’s a very dedicated group, and it gives a historical perspective to the courts,” she described. “It enables research, provides educational material for students, commissions portraits, sponsors speakers and special events, and ultimately increases awareness of our state’s legal legacy.”

For her achievements in both the courtroom and community, Judge Potts has been the recipient of numerous awards, such as the WONder Woman Award from the Women Officials’ Network in Oakland County.

“I was just very proud to get it,” she exclaimed. “I loved the idea of the award, and it was quite an honor to be recognized by this prestigious group.”



Oakland County’s Business Court Advisory Committee, including Judge Potts (front row, 2nd from left) and Judge James Alexander (front row, 3rd from left)

Reflecting on what she would like her professional legacy to be, Judge Potts sums it up succinctly: “That I was fair and smart.”

Her plans after leaving the bench include sleeping in until 7:00 a.m. and publishing a book that she’s been writing. Entitled “1200” — the number inscribed on her Oakland County Courthouse — the book will center on Judge Potts’ experience as a jurist. ✍️