

## **JURY DUTY IS NOT A LAUGHING MATTER IN A DEMOCRACY**

*By Mike Day, Allegan County Circuit Court Administrator*

We have all heard, and probably laughed at, the stories told of excuses used to try to get out of jury duty. Most recently in a high profile federal case there was the story of the juror who after the trial was underway failed to show up claiming heart problems. When questioned later by the Judge it was determined that she had actually spent the day at the race track!

While nothing quite that outrageous has occurred at the Circuit Court in Allegan, Circuit Court Administrator Michael Day says that he sees and hears more than his share of excuses each month as prospective jurors plead their case to get out of jury duty.

"While the Judges recognize that conflicts may exist," says Day. "My first priority has to be to make sure that the Court has enough jurors to conduct the trials we have scheduled."

Each month the Court summons (notifies) 180 prospective jurors of their selection for jury duty in Circuit Court. This group is broken into two jury pools, one for the first two weeks of the month and the other for the second two weeks of the month. Of the 180 potential jurors, Day receives an average of 40 requests to be excused. Typically the excuses include work conflicts, financial hardships, lack of child care, and transportation problems.

Recognizing that serving on a jury may not be everyone's idea of an enjoyable way to spend their day, the Court has taken some steps to try to make that service a little less painful.

"We have made some significant improvements to our jury assembly room where jurors wait before entering the courtroom", shares Day. "With the County's support we have purchased new more comfortable seating, installed two televisions and added two computer stations where jurors can sit and work on their laptop through the county wireless network."

Day goes on to explain that while jurors are not allowed to take their laptop into the courtroom with them (they are allowed to return it to their vehicle before going into the courtroom), we hope that by allowing jurors to conduct business or simply surf the web they will feel better about the time spent waiting for the actual selection process to begin.

'For our democratic system to work successfully, jury service is not only a constitutional duty that all of us as citizens are required to fulfill when called, it is also one of the most important services to society that any of us will have the opportunity to perform. Jurors are a vital part of our judicial system", Day said.

Day also reported that while he hears from many individuals reluctant to serve, many of those same people tell him after their service is complete that they actually ended up enjoying the experience.

"I think many people have a misconception regarding the amount of time jury service is going to take. Once they actually go through the process they find that they are fascinated by how the court works and tell me that they found the experience to be rewarding" Day said.