

# David L. Moffitt

Many lawyers are satisfied to have one successful career. Not David Moffitt. At age 52, he has had two outstanding careers, and has had them simultaneously. While operating the Law Offices of David L. Moffitt & Associates in Bingham Farms full time since 1979, Moffitt has spent enough hours in public service to qualify as a second career.

During his 20 years in public office, Moffitt has demonstrated a dedication to public policy widely recognized by his peers in both political parties, while achieving award-winning results in both the public and legal spheres. But Moffitt went further, and has been recognized as one of the most outstanding public officials in the metropolitan region. "His efforts set a powerful example of the value and need for lawyers to make the professional and financial sacrifice to serve in public office," wrote L. Brooks Patterson, Oakland County executive, and Thomas J. Ryan, past president of the State Bar of Michigan, when they nominated Moffitt for the SBM Frank J. Kelley Distinguished Public Service Award this year.

Moffitt's public service began on the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, winning the seat every two years for 20 years. He held the position of vice-chairman of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners for 2003–2005 and chaired or co-chaired numerous committees of the Board, including the Public Services Committee, Workplace Violence Policy Development Study Committee, Court Reform Study Committee, Zoning Coordinating Committee, Meeting Broadcast Study Committee, and Annual Report and Newsletter Committee. He was acting chairman, Oversight Committee; vice-chairman, Public Services Committee; vice-chairman, Planning and Building Commit-



*David Moffitt being interviewed by WWJ reporter Mike Payne on the occasion of the first televised Board of Commissioners meeting, May 1998, at Farmington Hills City Hall.*

tee; vice-chairman, Majority Party Caucus; and a member of the Personnel Committee. Prior to his first election, Moffitt frequently served as a public hearing officer for the Oakland County Road Commission.

Moffitt brought a lawyer's perspective to the Board of Commissioners, pointing out the dangers of ambiguous language, failure to include standard contractual clauses, and the potential liability for not following published procedures. He frequently navigated the language of court decisions, statutes, and corporation counsel opinions that help define the parameters of many county functions. He was known as the "Board's scrivener," regularly offering his legal writing skills to his Board colleagues and voluntarily editing proposed resolutions, whether he agreed with their substance or not.

Moffitt has demonstrated an often-recognized zeal for excellence, an even-handed, bipartisan approach to public policy issues that placed public benefit above partisan concerns. Moffitt initiated resolutions that ensured top value for the sale of county prop-

erty, established and administered procedures for fair and open selection of appointees to government positions, initiated computer usage at the Board of Commissioners, initiated "Student Government Day" at Oakland County, pioneered cable TV broadcast of Commissioner meetings (for which he received a SEMCOG Joint Public Services Merit Award), established a *Krystallnacht* Commemoration Day, wrote and printed self-financed brochures on county government services, appeared in classrooms, personally edited the county newsletter, and created its first "e-newsletter." In 1999, Moffitt founded and hosted a monthly cable TV show, "Commissioner's Corner," to discuss county government issues, regularly inviting both Democrats and Republicans to share their views.

As a Commissioner, he consistently sought even-handed treatment of the county's rank and file employees and articulated the necessity to give full consideration to environmental groups, the families of the jail population, and the needs of the homeless.

## AWARDS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Thomas M. Cooley Law School  
"Most Distinguished Brief to the  
Supreme Court Award"

SEMCOG Alfred A. Taubman  
Fellowship, annually awarded  
to "the best and brightest"  
of southeast Michigan's  
elected leaders

Full-course tuition scholarship  
to John F. Kennedy School of  
Government, Harvard University,  
for seminar course "Senior  
Executives in State And  
Local Government"

Repeatedly named an "All Star  
of County Law Enforcement"  
by the Oakland County  
Sheriff's Department

"Who's Who in American Law"  
(eight years) and "Who's Who  
in America" (six years)

Certified Citizen Planner by  
Michigan State University and  
the Michigan Society of Zoning  
and Planning Officials

Editorial Board Member,  
*Journal of the State Bar of  
Michigan's Corporation,  
Finance, and Business Law  
Section (1978-1979)*

U of D-Mercy: Administrator  
Emeritus, David L. Moffitt  
Scholarships for Outstanding  
Legal Editorial Achievement and  
Outstanding Legal Journalism  
(1981-1994); Clarence M.  
Burton/Dean's Scholarship;  
Managing Editor and Associate  
Editor, *Journal of Urban Law*;  
American Jurisprudence Award,  
Contracts; Moot Court Board  
of Directors Award

## *His efforts set a powerful example of the value and need for lawyers to make the professional and financial sacrifice to serve in public office.*

In 1998, Farmington Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer publicly praised Moffitt's "distinguished leadership" for personally writing and introducing a resolution to plan, build, finance, and operate a county-wide unified system of public safety communication, following the tragic workplace fatalities at the Wixom Assembly Plant. The measure involved considerable political risk because it involved placing a surcharge on phone lines to finance the operation of the system and to modernize county public service answering points. Moffitt worked to build public support and the plan was adopted after months of hearings. Work continues to this day to fully implement the massive, leading-edge system. Moffitt received a personal letter of thanks from almost every police chief in the county after the measure's adoption.

The Oakland County Board selected Moffitt to represent the county on the Board of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), where he was elected vice-chairman. SEMCOG is a regional planning agency established under state law, embracing a seven-county region, which apports up to 1.5 billion dollars annually in federal transportation and air quality funds in southeast Michigan. The vice-chairman is an uncompensated volunteer elected by the general assembly of its 140-plus membership, requiring prior election as a member of its executive committee. Moffitt also served as a member of SEMCOG's standing By-laws and Legal Committees.

His unanimous selection in 2004 as one of two of SEMCOG's most outstanding public officials was made by a five-person board, two members of which, City of Detroit Council President Pro Tem Kenneth Cockrel and Detroit Water Board Chairperson Mary Blackmon, were often on opposite sides of regional issues with Oakland County.

When running for office, Moffitt received newspaper editorial endorsements from all leading regional newspapers every year of his candidacy, and was awarded the highest rating of the statewide *Civic Searchlight* candidate rating authority. Although it was widely anticipated he would win an 11th bid for County Commissioner and be next in line as chairman of the County Board of Commissioners, Moffitt declined to seek re-election and retired from public office in January 2005 to devote more time to his law practice and to the special needs of his family, as a single father of two teenagers.

On the legal front, as an active litigator, Moffitt was featured in November 2004 and September 2005 on the front pages of *Lawyer's Weekly* for winning important precedents in first- and third-party automobile cases. A published legal author and former law review editor, he established a scholarship program at the U of D-Mercy School of Law in 1981 to award scholarships to the editor and the author of the best article in the *Journal* of the State Bar of Michigan's Corporation, Finance and Business Law Section.

Moffitt has been covered in various news articles for his high-profile cases or his commissioner work in the *Detroit Legal News*, *Oakland County Legal News*, *Lawyer's Weekly*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Detroit News*, *The Oakland Press*, *Farmington Hills Gazette*, *Northwest Gazette*, *Ann Arbor News*, *Troy Times*, the *Observer & Eccentric* newspapers, *Macomb Daily*, and *Crain's Detroit Business*, and on many radio and television stations. ♦

*Francine Cullari practices real estate, estate planning, and business law in Grand Blanc. She is vice-chairperson of the State Bar of Michigan Publications and Website Advisory Committee, where she is responsible for the Michigan Bar Journal. She is the editor of Bar Beat, a local magazine for the legal profession.*