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Pagers let prospective jurors roam

By Chad Selweski
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Taking a cue from busy restaurants, Macomb County Clerk Carmella Sabaugh will issue pagers to those serving jury duty, allowing them to wander downtown Mount Clemens until they're called to report to a courtroom.

Under the new system proposed Tuesday, the 225 to 250 potential jurors who report for duty each week in Macomb County Circuit Court would be given a pager. They would be instructed that, when the

Mount Clemens merchants roll out welcome mat

pager goes off, they have 10 or 15 minutes to report to the courthouse.

Sabaugh said the program would relieve jurors of the tedious process of sitting in the jury room, located on the fifth floor of the courthouse, for hours at a time waiting to be picked for a trial.

"It's something we've been wanting to do for a long time. But it never really did take form until now," she said. "I think this will be good for the jurors and for the Mount Clemens business community."

Arthur Mullen, executive director of the Mount Clemens Downtown Development Authority, could barely contain his excitement over the proposal.

"We love it. We would be in complete support," Mullen said. "They will get to know our beautiful

See PAGERS, Page 12A



Macomb Daily staff photo by David N. Posavetz

County Clerk Carmella Sabaugh said a new pager system will allow jurors to wander downtown Mount Clemens while awaiting duty.

PAGERS: SMART provides free rides

Continued from Page 1A

downtown, our shops and restaurants. They'll get a flavor of it and be interested in coming back."

County officials are still researching the matter, but it appears Macomb may be the first community in the nation to employ pagers for its jurors. Sabaugh said she believes that the process used by many restaurants, giving customers a pager that allows them to shop or run errands while waiting for a table, would work equally well for the jury selection system.

Last year, 23,000 residents were called to circuit court jury duty. That number is growing, with more than 16,000 called this year through Aug. 31. For many,

the process involves a frustrating wait without ever being placed in a trial.

Officials say the pager process would make the experience more relaxing, producing juries that are in a better frame of mind, and reducing the number of those who request to be excused.

The plan was unanimously approved by a county Board of Commissioners committee Tuesday and is expected to receive final approval from the full board next week. If the circuit judges have no objections, Sabaugh will seek bids for pagers in the coming weeks and the program could be put in place by spring.

With the support of Chief Circuit Judge Antonio Viviano, Sabaugh has initiated a number

of jury system innovations.

The one-day, one-trial system allows most to be dismissed after one day if they're not picked for a case. A partnership with the SMART bus system provides a free ride to the courthouse for those who lack transportation. Free wireless Internet service was installed in the jury room for those who want to bring a laptop computer. And a pact with the Mount Clemens Public Library offers free books and other reading materials for the jury room.

Sabaugh said the pager system is yet another attempt to provide a more pleasant experience for those who dread jury duty.

"It's definitely worth a try," she said, "and I don't think it's going to be very expensive."