

Rooker Report

January 18, 1995

Published by the Davidson County Circuit Court Clerk's Office

Vol.2, No. 12

IT WAS A GOOD YEAR FOR THE CHILDREN

Providing financial stability for the children of divorce could be likened to steadily dripping water into a bucket with a hole in the bottom.

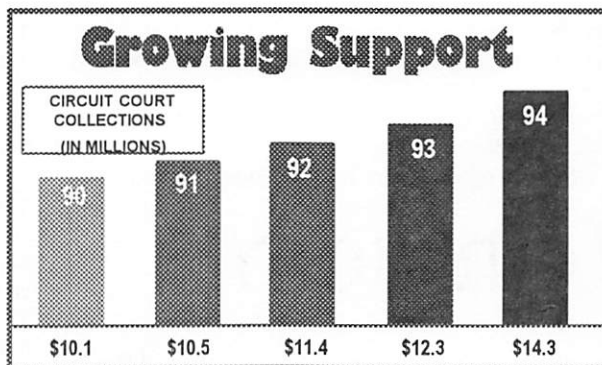
No matter how much water you add, the bucket never gets full.

The idea is to increase the water pressure so there is more water going in than out. Only then will the water level begin to rise.

In Davidson County last year, application of that theory resulted in a significantly higher water level for the thousands of children on child support rolls.

Intensified enforcement efforts proved to be the release valve for unprecedented dollar payouts by non-custodial parents, many arriving at the moral gates of judgment via judicial escort. Their greetings were sternly worded commands: pour your share into the bucket.

When the year was over, there was a high water mark of \$14,377,988 and fewer of the county's dependent children went to bed hungry. There was 17 percent more water in the bucket than the year before and a greater healing of emotional scars. There



was nicer clothing, straighter teeth, healthier bodies and brighter outlooks. And, for many innocent victims of divorce, there was a reborn contentment of being loved again for the first time.

Never in Nashville's history has so many dollars been made available to produce those basic elements of life normally reserved for normal, undivided households. But those in charge of making it happen -- the courts, federal, state and local lawmakers and private enterprise --

continued to apply pressure to ensure that parental responsibility be fulfilled, either voluntarily or by force. To apply the aforementioned analogy, they took control of the water faucet.

There is no way to accurately account for the total number of cases in which child support payments are involved. Hundreds of custody divorces are settled amicably with agreed support payments being handled between the parties without court intervention. As the keeper of records for the courts, the Circuit Court Clerk

(See A GOOD YEAR, Page 2)

Computer Team Matches Speed Against Tickets

It is 3 o'clock in the afternoon and workers in the Traffic Violations Bureau are winding down another day of tending to the motoring public's agony of misjudgments.

In an hour, the nucleus of the bureau staff will methodically vacate the premises, leaving the day's scant remnants to a skeleton night crew. But for now, there is an almost desperate mission to clean the slate, to start the next day even with the board -- one-on-one -- human skill against paper enemy in hourglass combat.

Flying fingers stroke the keyboards of computers, banging out a persistent rhythmic beat. Rat-a-tat-tat-tat...Rat-a-tat-tat-tat.

Like insatiable Pac-Men, the machines gobble the data in equal rapidity, storing it away to be permanently digested on selective command.

The intensity of the moment is unbeknownst to the general public gathered at the glass cashier window several feet away. It is confined to a small anteroom off the bureau's main open office area and, for lack of a more fitting name, is known simply as the "computer room."



Metaphorically, however, it is the aorta of arteries that pump blood into the administrative aspect of the county's traffic enforcement program. For it is inside this cozy compartment that every single transaction related to both moving and parking violations is electronically recorded -- from origination to adjudication and everything in between.

To put that in perspective, during the past calendar year (the lowest output in five years) traffic officers issued more than a quarter of a million individual citations, resulting in over 355,000 separate offenses.

While the day-to-day influx varies in numbers, computer room workers can expect to face more than 1,000 new tickets upon their early morning arrival each day. Following the weekend closing, the mountain of Monday morning mail represents an ominous beginning for the work week, the only day that poses a serious challenge to workload completion goals.

Today is one such day. The time for levity has been at a premium and much-needed breaks to relax burning eyes and fatigued spinal cords have been abbreviated. But the workers know

(See BEATING TICKETS, Page 3)

A GOOD YEAR FOR THE CHILDREN...

(From Page 1)

collects, distributes and provides accountings for all payments made through the courts. This system protects the interests of both sides and provides documentation of all transactions germane to the case history, a viable instrument when disputes prompt judicial review.

The Juvenile Court Clerk also has that fiduciary responsibility and adds several millions of dollars to the county's overall child support collections each year.

During the current decade, the courts have taken a firmer stance against those who

would shirk financial obligations to their children. Their most effective weapon has been the imposition of wage assignment, requiring employers to deduct child support payments from paychecks of those who refuse to comply on their own. This method, once a mere option to the courts, proved to be so effective that state lawmakers made it a mandatory practice starting last July.

But much of the credit for the steady upward trend in support collections during the 90s goes to private companies that devote fulltime to tracking down deadbeat parents in exchange for a percentage. Maximus, Inc.,

is such a company and has made a serious impact since its arrival in Davidson County two years ago.

While there is no way to differentiate the agency level of cases successfully executed by Maximus, collections attached to Circuit Court jurisdiction have been significant. The number of daily payments rose from 381 in 1993 to 425 during the past year, representing a per diem dollar increase of \$7,986 for the children. That nets out to \$57,743 in daily receipts and payments for the circuit support cases, which now are in excess of 8,000 and growing at a rate of about 10 percent a year.

Of the 3,793 couples who filed for dissolution of their marriages here during the past year, 1,739 of the cases involved children. That figure was slightly higher than the year before and, no doubt, will be lower in the bottom line of this year's report.

But cold, raw figures can't express the human element of society. They can only reflect the severity of a situation.

A state study released earlier this month painted a more accurate picture, perhaps, of the true life status of children in Tennessee. The study showed that fewer infants and children died during the past year; there were fewer teen-age pregnancies and cases of sexually transmitted diseases; the number of school dropouts fell and more children had health insurance than before.

Add those characteristics to the fact that the quality of life improved through stronger enforcement of child support laws and there can be only one conclusion:

It was a good year for the children...at least some of them.

...HOLY MATRIMONY

Wedding chapels were almost twice as popular as divorce court during the past year in Davidson County.

While 3,793 married couples were calling it quits, church bells were working overtime to accommodate a record 7,060 newlywed duets.

The Davidson County Clerk's Office, which issues marriage licenses, says the surprising number of applicants was representative of countries all over the world.

Because of Tennessee's liberal matrimony laws (no waiting period, no blood test, no AIDS testing) Nashville is a natural mecca for couples to get hitched. "They come here as tourists and leave here as newlyweds," said a marriage license clerk.

Of course, June was the most popular time for exchanging vows, but not by much. While there

were 722 licenses issued to June brides and grooms, the number was just one higher than August.

The number of divorce filings was only 40 more than the year before, representing a normal trend for the current decade. The highest number of divorce filings during the first half of the 90s was in 1992 when 4,013 failings were recorded.

Interestingly, the number of divorces granted by the courts during the past year was 3,744, an indication of how efficiently the system works.

More than half of divorce cases are based on grounds of irreconcilable differences, meaning neither side opposes the split. There were 2,010 of those last year, compared with 1,909 the previous year. The downside was that 46 percent of the divorcing couples were parents.

Courting the Nineties

YEAR >>>	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
CIRCUIT COURT					
Civil Suits Filed	4,615	4,609	4,306	4,389	4,594
Adjudicated	4,482	5,297	4,632	4,676	4,516
Divorce Cases Filed	3,860	3,884	4,013	3,753	3,793
SESSIONS CIVIL					
New Cases Filed	41,490	37,511	35,804	35,740	37,198
Executions Issued	25,800	27,091	29,826	31,225	29,588
Garnishment Receipts	42,735	46,841	46,705	43,862	44,233
TRAFFIC (MOVING)					
Tickets Issued	223,913	225,822	243,888	248,421	214,424
Adjudicated	95,952	83,293	87,293	86,222	82,653
TRAFFIC (PARKING)					
Tickets Issued	148,715	134,151	125,904	151,188	140,602
Adjudicated	121,306	106,834	95,845	111,396	98,921
PROBATE					
Original Filings	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,760	1,961
Cases Closed	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,859	1,392
Cases Retired	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	407

..AND CHARITIES

Employees shared their hearts and their pocketbooks unselfishly with those less fortunate during the past year's "giving season."

The combined contribution of Circuit, General Sessions Civil, Probate and Traffic Violations Bureau was \$3,639 for the Metro Employee Consolidated Charity Campaign, an increase of \$220 over the previous year.

And the workers made Christmas a little brighter for two needy families and three adopted "angels."

Circuit Court employees played Santa to a family of ten while Traffic Violations Bureau workers selected a family of four from a Department of Human Services eligibility list.

Clothing and toys were the main items presented to the families. Similar gifts were donated in the names of three children adopted from the Salvation Army Angel Trees.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: IN FOCUS AND INCREASING?

Of all the changes that took place within the judicial system during 1994 (you almost needed a program to keep up) no single subject was dealt with more intently than domestic violence.

State lawmakers and the courts sent out loud wake-up calls to those who would inflict bodily harm on members of their own families. Easier access to remedy, more severe penalties and greater community support were only molars of a mouthful of teeth molded to take a bite out of spousal abuse.

If deadbeat parents were the state's most wanted, then wife beaters surely were the most unwanted.

Yet, the incidence of domestic violence continued to grow. Or, at least the number of "reported" incidents became significantly higher following the new enforcement rules.

During the calendar year of 1993 when all order of protection petitions were under exclusive jurisdiction of Circuit Court, only 708 complaints were filed by victims. That number grew to 1,122 during the past year when protection order jurisdiction was extended to the General Sessions courts and criminal punishment was approved for violations.

Officials surmise that the new "get tough" policies, combined with a broader awareness of the subject, have given more victims the courage to step forward without fear of retribution.

Those defendants who have dared test the seriousness of their offenses have found the courts to be non-hesitant in doling out 10-day jail sentences, together with \$50 fines. And violators now must consider the fact that their actions can provide them with a lifetime criminal record, regardless of which court finds them in contempt.

Circuit Court still maintains jurisdiction over all protection orders growing out of pending divorces and child custody cases. The balance is handled by the lower courts, from issuance to conclusion.

Despite the reassignment of protection orders, the circuit courts failed to get a breather in the overall number of domestic-related cases. Year-end statistics showed that 2,465 other domestic petitions were filed during the year, 122 more than the year before. And of the 4,594 other civil lawsuits filed, 2,006 litigants asked that their cases be determined by jury trials, a greater percentage than in the past.

Beating Tickets is Daily Challenge for Computer Team

(From Page 1)

that what doesn't get done today must be dealt with tomorrow. So, the beat goes on. Rat-a-tat-tat-tat... Rat-a-tat-tat-tat.

Supervisor Leslie Allumbaugh leads the charge, her desk piled high with a lion's share of the workload. A hands-on boss, she thrives on staying busy and does so while categorically distributing daily entry responsibilities to her eight fellow crew members.

Experience (almost 11 years at the helm) has conditioned Allumbaugh in all phases of the complex operation. She has studied the strengths of each individual crew member and applies that knowledge for maximum benefit. It is this attribute that will prevent a surplus on this particular hectic day.

Not only is speed typing an essential element of data entry, but operators must be equally adept at accuracy. Mistakes are certain invitations to extra, unnecessary work that will precipitate from the scrutiny of proofreaders who will later compare computer entries to original ticket information.

Such mistakes are rare, as most of the computer operators are seasoned at their jobs and have developed an uncanny familiarity with the penmanship idiosyncrasies of those who write the tickets.

Legibility is often lost in the field as patrolmen try to apply writing skills on hand-held ticket books. With this in mind, computer room employees often post samples of many officers' handwriting to use as references during the entry process.

Because of the vast volume, every shortcut to brevity is important. The number of tickets funneled through the bureau each day becomes magnified many times over in the process of preserving their biographies.

Complete and accurate records are as important to an individual's driving record as a credit report and are very similar in terms of personal reference. Increased insurance rates, or even policy sus-

pensions, are often determined by a person's driving habits. Consequently, insurance companies closely monitor the records of their policyholders.

The bureau is required by law to report to the state all moving violations involving speeds in excess of 20 miles per hour over the speed limit on limited access roads. Citations falling into this category must bear a special identifying code in the computer system to accommodate that report if the driver is convicted. Just another element of the many faceted computer operator job description.

Further enhancement comes from the pure design of the Metro traffic ticket, which allows up to five violations on a single citation. Each violation must be entered, along with the final disposition.

Each ticket will find its way back into the computer room for updates at least twice before it finally reaches the adjudicated files or is converted to warrant for non-compliance.

Following initial entry, each ticket is returned to the computer room three working days in advance of the assigned court date for record updates. This practice allows interval violations to be consolidated and assists the courts in determining disposition. The ticket is returned to the computer room yet another time for posting the courtroom results.

Additional entries are necessary when court date continuances are granted or when violators are ordered to attend traffic school classes. So, in truth, the quarter of a million original citations issued last year represented well over a million entries for the efficient bureau computer team.

(In addition to Allumbaugh, the current computer team consists of Kelly Hollingsworth, Carlene Stoehr, Billye Barnard, Robin Smith, Annette Wheeler, Nancy Capps, Betsy Campbell and Nicole Fielder.)

This should not be construed as an effort to minimize the important roles of other workers in the bureau. The same tickets get hands-on treatment from a great number of other assigned personnel -- from cashiers to file clerks to validators to bookkeepers and warrant officers.

With so many tickets going through so many stages, one might wonder how it is possible to keep track of the cases. The answer is simple; just listen closely...

Rat-a-tat-tat-tat... Rat-a-tat-tat-tat.



ALLUMBAUGH
...Digging in



DATA BANK

Statistics compiled for the month of December

Case Information

Circuit Court

New Civil Cases Filed.....	356
Civil Cases Concluded.....	269
New Divorce Cases Filed.....	249
Divorce Cases Closed.....	232

General Sessions Civil

New Cases Filed.....	2,791
Executions Issued.....	2,176
Judgments Collected.....	\$505,807

Probate Court

New Cases Filed.....	132
Cases Closed.....	112
Cases Retired.....	85

Traffic Violations

Moving Citations.....	14,473
Parking Violations.....	12,520
Total Fines Collected.....	\$265,953
Nullifications.....	1,454
Nullification Fees Collected.....	\$13,086

Circuit Court Jury Trial Verdicts

Week of November 28

Case	Type	Court	Verdict
92C-1398-1598 ✓	Auto Accident	6th	Mistrial
92C-1154	Assault	1st	(P) \$800.00
92C-3064 ✓	Auto Accident	2nd	(P) \$1,091.00
94C-2757	Contract	1st	Defendant

Week of December 5

Case	Type	Court	Verdict
93C-580	Medical Malpractice	6th	Defendant
92C-1093	Slip & Fall	3rd	Directed Verdict

Federal Employee Garnishment Information

At right are the routing instructions now required on executions of garnishment against U.S. Postal Service workers and civilian employees of the U.S. Department of Defense:

U.S. POSTAL SERVICE
 Manager, Payroll Processing Branch,
 1 Federal Drive, Ft. Snelling, MN 55111-9650.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
 Defense Finance and Accounting Service,
 Cleveland Center, Office of General Counsel, Code L, P.O. Box 998002,
 Cleveland, OH 44199-8002.

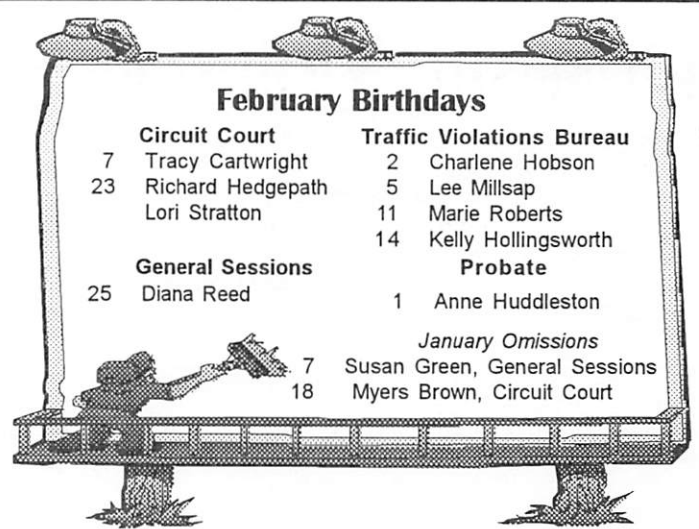
Advance postage payment of \$8.19 must also accompany filing of process.

Rooker Report

Published by the Davidson County Circuit Court Clerk's Office
 506 Metro Courthouse, Nashville, TN 37201

Established by George L. Rooker (1929-1993),
 (Circuit Court Clerk, 1968-1993)

Richard R. Rooker Circuit Court Clerk
 Gene Baker Editor



February Birthdays

Circuit Court		Traffic Violations Bureau	
7	Tracy Cartwright	2	Charlene Hobson
23	Richard Hedgepath	5	Lee Millsap
	Lori Stratton	11	Marie Roberts
		14	Kelly Hollingsworth
General Sessions		Probate	
25	Diana Reed	1	Anne Huddleston

January Omissions

7	Susan Green, General Sessions
18	Myers Brown, Circuit Court

Cheers...

General Sessions Judge **William Faimon** heads our list of persons who deserve applause this month. Judge Faimon underwent hip replacement surgery at St. Thomas Hospital last month and wasted no time in returning to the bench following the holiday break. Word is, the procedure was so successful that surgery on his other hip might not be necessary, as had been expected...There's good reason for the added pep in the step of Traffic Warrant Officer **Pat Trimble** these days. Trimble became a husband on Jan. 3, repeating vows to **Marie Patricia Ussery** during private ceremonies in Madison...Traffic Docket Clerk **Pat Baxter** (ever notice how many people have the name Pat?) became a grandmother for the first time on Dec. 30. Son **Larry Wilhoite Jr.** and wife **Travonya** welcomed daughter **Teaira Jene Wilhoite** into the family. The couple's first child distributed 7 pounds, 10 ounces over a 20-inch-long figure...Speaking of figures, **Bubba Campbell** has been cutting some pretty fancy ones on the bowling lanes lately. The father of traffic computer operator **Betsy Campbell** rolled perfect 300 games two weeks in a row in a local post office league. Okay, Betsy, so you really *do* have a perfect dad...**Lori Stratton**, calendar clerk to Circuit Court Judge **Thomas Brothers**, recently earned certification as a "professional secretary." Academic to us; we already knew she was professional...As expected, **Gov. Ned McWherter** selected Judge **Penny White** of Johnson City to fill a vacancy on the state Supreme Court. White, the only female jurist on the high court panel, replaces Justice Charles O'Brien, who retired in October...Our hats are also off to new U.S. Magistrate **Juliet Griffin** of Nashville, who was appointed to replace the retiring **Kent Sandidge**. Judge Griffin won't have trouble finding her way to work. She's been parking at the Federal Building for quite some time while serving as clerk to the U.S. District Court.

...Tears

Deepest sympathy to deputy circuit court clerk **Holly Russell** in the devastating loss of both her parents within a one-month period. Her mother **Leola Russell** passed away from cancer at the family's home on Dec. 11. Then, four weeks later to the day, her father, **Hollis Russell**, died from cancer as well, also at home. Our prayers are with Holly and her family during this crucial time of mourning... Condolences also are extended to:

Traffic Warrant Office Supervisor **Richard Vester** in the death of his brother **Joseph Vester**, who passed away on Jan. 9 at the age of 75. He, too, was a victim of cancer.

General Sessions Court Officer **Ernest Hickerson** in the passing of his father, **Ernest Leroy Hickerson**, who died in Lewisburg on Dec. 27 at the age of 91.

The family of former Circuit Court Judge **Sam L. Felts Jr.**, who died this month at his home in Fair Oaks, Calif.