

# Assistant prosecutor 'expands horizons'

By JAMES L. SMITH  
Of The Oakland Press

An Oakland County assistant prosecutor has moved his shingle and taken his white hat to the greener and larger pasture of the U.S. attorney's office in Detroit.

It's not that Al Wolf didn't enjoy his six-year stay with the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office, because he said he loved nearly every minute of it.

"My three-year commitment turned into six years, and it was one of the best experiences of my life," Wolf said. "I'm leaving a great place to work, but I've gone as far as I can go in the office. I wanted to expand my horizons."

Wolf was sworn in Tuesday as a U.S. assistant attorney in a ceremony in Detroit.

A former broadcast journalist for local stations WPON and WWJ, Wolf took night law classes at his alma mater, Wayne State University, with an eye on expanding his broadcast career by specializing in law reporting.

Fred Graham, a CBS news law correspondent, told Wolf if he couldn't land a job as a law correspondent that he should practice law and get some trial experience before returning to broadcasting.

While Wolf may be heard as an interviewee on the radio in the future, his love of trial work will probably make a return to the other side of the microphone unlikely.

As it turned out, his experiences and skills as a journalist have helped him in his law career instead, Wolf said.

Investigation, listening and speech techniques he learned as a broadcaster have been incorporated into his trial work.

During his news-gathering career,



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## Al Wolf (left) with chief U.S. Attorney Roy Hayes in Detroit

one of Wolf's beats was the Oakland County courthouse, which brought him the acquaintance of Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson, who encouraged Wolf to stick with his law studies.

It was at Patterson's request that Wolf sent him a job resume after passing the bar.

Wolf said he has never had to send another job application.

Patterson said he has never regretted giving Wolf a chance.

"I have a staff of good solid trial lawyers and every so often a great one comes along and Al Wolf is in that

league," Patterson said.

Wolf was an Oakland County assistant prosecutor, but he was given special trial assignments that were usually highly visible cases or especially difficult ones.

Influencing his departure was the fact there were no positions for him to be promoted to and the lack of a county retirement plan for assistant prosecutors.

But learning and mastering the federal court system is something that Wolf might have considered a challenge even without the added pay and benefits.

But would he consider a career as a defense lawyer? "I enjoy public service and I enjoy being the one wearing the white hat in the courtroom," Wolf said. "In my mind I wouldn't feel comfortable representing criminal defendants."

As a defense attorney Wolf said he would be forced to represent people he knew were guilty of crimes and try to get them off.

"To defense attorneys it's a game to see if I can beat the system — 'Can I beat the prosecutor? Can I beat the state?'" Wolf said. "It's clearly not a game to me."

Not a game, Wolf said, because he has seen the tragic results of crimes on victims and their families.

As an assistant prosecutor, Wolf represented the people of the state of Michigan vs. a multitude of defendants during his career.

In his new job he'll be representing a somewhat larger clientele — the people of the United States.

Wolf said he thanks a philosophy he inherited from Patterson and psyches himself up for trials by looking at his "real" client as the individual victims.

If he could change just one thing about the system it would be its focus.

"I would like to be able to change the system to the victim justice system instead of the criminal justice system," Wolf said. "In that system you would concentrate on justice for the victim."

His first assignment will be to clean up some cases left behind by an attorney who was transferred to another office and to spend 90 days in the general crimes unit "getting my feet wet."

Wolf and his wife, Suzy, live in Farmington Hills with son Jeremy, 6.