

Thank you for looking into and bring attention to the “questionable” business practices of MERS. As a former employee, I can relate and remember many of the statements that have been made on your website. The posting regarding the unethical business activities hit a nerve as I know of various events that fit into that category. For example, if you read the attached article you will see that John “Jack” LaBelle is the longest consecutive serving county commissioner in the state of Michigan. So how is it then, if he has never had a break in service that he began to draw his pension in December of 2004? The MERS plan document specifically stated at the period of time that a person could begin to draw their pension after termination, and could only be hired back by the municipality after a 30 day separation of service. If you go on the Livingston County website, they have the Board Minutes for 2004 posted and nowhere does it state that Commissioner LaBelle stepped down from service as an elected official (and thus County employee) for any period of time. This County also had another employee, Evelyn Montgomery, who drew her pension for many years prior to her “official” retirement in the beginning of 2010.

This is only an example of one municipality. It is because of issues like this that MERS changed their plan documents to reflect a longer separation of service. So if MERS is aware of these types of issues, how are they handling them?

Hope you look into this matter.



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EMS facility honors LaBelle

By Jim Totten  
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In his 44 years on the Livingston County Board of Commissioners, John "Jack" LaBelle has faced his share of angry residents.

Yet none quite like the one who showed up to a public hearing he was chairing in the 1970s about what to do with the historic Livingston County Courthouse in downtown Howell. At the time, the county was considering de-molishing the structure to make way for a new court complex.

That resident was Jack La-Belle's wife, Beverly.

Jack LaBelle said his wife was dressed sharp — "looking good" — and he figured her presence could only help the fairly new county commissioner. Boy, was he wrong.

"Oh, did she criticize me, only as a wife can do. I felt her claws in my throat in two sentences," he said, laughing. "It was one of the five most shocking moments in my life."

Beverly LaBelle asked the county officials what they planned to do with the courthouse and said it would be a shame if the structure was demolished.

"I got carried away," she said about her passionate plea that evening.

Beverly LaBelle said it would have been "terrible" and "such a loss" if the building was demolished, and she spearheaded an effort to save the courthouse. The issue was put to a countywide vote, and it was narrowly ap-proved, winning by 100 votes.

"It was very, very exciting times," she said.

Those times are ending for Jack LaBelle, who is leaving the county board after being defeated in the August primary.

On Monday, the county board honored Jack LaBelle for his service by naming the new Livingston County EMS facility after him. The \$11 million headquarters, currently under construction, will be known as the John E. LaBelle Livingston County Public Safety Complex. It will house paramedics and a University of Michigan Survival Flight medical helicopter, and it will serve as a training facility.

Jack LaBelle made the motion for Livingston County to create its own ambulance service in the early 1970s. The county had been contracting with private ambulance services until that time.

"We felt the service could be improved without throwing an undue burden on the taxpayers," he said.

The service has grown and been quite successful. Livingston County EMS has 69 full-time employees, 20 part-time employees and five medical-examiner employees. The service is funded by a countywide

property tax that costs most homeowners considerably less than a dollar a week.

"That was very nice of them," Jack LaBelle said about the board's action. "I didn't expect it."

Jack LaBelle has served on the county board since it was created in 1968. The county previously had a board of supervisors, which was comprised of a supervisor from each township.

Shasta Pohl, executive assistant to the director at Michigan Association of Counties, said Jack LaBelle is the longest-serving, consecutively running county commissioner in the state. She said Johnie Rodebush of Cass County served 43 years but with a short break.

Jack LaBelle doesn't make much of his long service to the county board.

"I'm the longest-serving commissioner in the state," he said this year. "I don't know if that's a sign of brilliance or stupidity."

Jack LaBelle has chaired the county board numerous times and has been the longtime chairman of the Finance Committee. He said he also pushed to create the Veterans Affairs Department and Planning Department.

"It's been a good run," Beverly LaBelle said about her husband's service.