

* **FRUGAL COURTROOM** — Three cheers for the county for insisting that, given today's budget crisis, a new courtroom be brought on line without the usual frills.

When the state appointed a 12th Circuit Court judge to handle the growing caseload, officials decided they would need an 11th courtroom in Annapolis' county courthouse. Their estimate of the cost: \$1.2 million. County Executive John R. Leopold balked, ordering that the courtroom be built for no more than \$100,000.

And it was. A training room for the Sheriff's Office was converted into a courtroom with the help of scavenged benches, furniture and building materials, and generous use of stained plywood.

This makes sense to us. It ought to be the model for future courthouse expansions, even after the economy recovers.