

Maricopa Lawyer  
Clerk's Corner  
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By Michael K. Jeanes, Clerk of the Superior Court

**This thank you has been building for 37 years**

January 2018 will be my last full month as your Clerk of the Superior Court. After 20 years as Clerk and 37 years within the Maricopa County system, the time has come to retire. The adage is true that the days are long but the years are short. I remember my first day of work as a management intern for the county in 1980 that turned into a management analyst position in 1981 and how those jobs turned into opportunities with superior court and the clerk's office.

When I started with the clerk's office in 1987, there were 51 judges (there are now nearly 100, plus dozens of commissioners), there was no docket, and the courtroom clerks created minute entries on typewriters. In the 1990s the office managed through moving from typewriters to computers and wrestled again in the 2000s moving from a paper record to a digital record and then to electronic filing. Those were long days and short years. Along the way I lobbied the Board of Supervisors to build a much-needed records center to contain the mountains of paper that were bursting from our limited space. Part of the pitch for that project was a promise that – through technology – I would never ask for another building or expansion to store paper. I kept that promise and retrained employees who had been moving paper to do new jobs working with the technology.

Someone once asked what I believe about the clerk's office that the general public would never believe. After decades of talking to community associations, fraternal organizations, and people inside and outside of the justice system, I believe the clerk's office plays an enormously vital role in the judicial branch, the judicial system, and in justice itself. Most people have the perception of line staff clerks as pencil pushers—a nondescript and boring routine of administrative paperwork. Most people don't comprehend the responsibility and role of clerks until they hear about it at some kind of presentation or educational program.

Clerk's office staff process hundreds of thousands of dollars every business day. People may think of filing and copy charges, but this is also restitution to victims that plays a key part in serving justice, bonds to carry cases to appeal, or to release defendants pending future hearings. Clerks deal with life and death decisions, not just in dealing face-to-face with upset customers, parties, and family members, but as a consequence of the accuracy they need to have in the minutes they prepare. Clerk-created documents cannot confuse one party for another without dire consequences. Every document created by or entrusted to the clerk's office is an official record and is vitally important to the individuals in individual cases. With tens of thousands of pages of documents being handled every day, a 99.9% error rate is unacceptable because the record needs to be accurate and complete.

I met a man on the campaign trail years ago and his comment stuck with me my entire career. He said he would vote for me because he didn't see my name in the headlines. Most people don't see us – they don't know what we do and they wouldn't believe the level of importance clerks play in our country's justice system. Accuracy and diligence are what keep tragedies out of the headlines and are some of the ways clerks prove their value and importance. I am proud and thankful every day for this office's long success in that area.

Maricopa County provided me a career of leading a dedicated, hardworking team doing work that makes a difference. I enjoyed teaching a customer service class to all new employees over the years and when I was able to go out to the law firms and different events to answer questions and update the legal community on changes and improvements in the office. The county was even where I met my wife, Jill, who worked in the county's human resources department before starting her 21-year career as a teacher and Education Program Specialist.

It has been a great pleasure contributing articles for the *Maricopa Lawyer* and I will fondly remember your kind words for me and my office when we met at the MCBA's Annual Meetings, Hall of Fame lunches, the Bench/Bar Conferences, and other great MCBA programs. You made a non-lawyer feel welcome and connected for many rewarding years!

As this adventure winds down, please accept my humble and sincere thanks for the opportunity to represent you as your elected Clerk of the Superior Court in Maricopa County. Remembering the many challenges, committee work on court rules, bonds, victim issues, numerous reforms, technology changes, population explosions and restrictions, and everything in between, I am thankful and grateful for the chance you gave me to serve and for the support you provided. Thank you.