

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

The Fascinating World of Exhibits

The Clerk's Office is the official record keeper for Superior Court. As one function of the Clerk's responsibilities, the exhibits department maintains and processes an average of 150,000 exhibits each year. With some exceptions, exhibits are public records that can be viewed and copied. National and international media outlets regularly visit the Clerk's exhibits area to film items for use in television, books and documentaries.

The Clerk's Office follows a records retention schedule for exhibits, allowing the office to return or dispose of exhibits at defined times. Some exhibits must be maintained for decades or forever, such as exhibits from capital murder convictions. Exhibits can range in size from tiny spy cameras to large sections of an entire wall, as in the Doody case mentioned in this month's Court Watch article. Papers, pictures, pills, diaries, maps, knives, guns, axes and other weapons, bed posts and entire beds, other items ranging from ordinary to one-of-a-kind and yes, the kitchen sink, fill the Clerk's exhibits area, representing pieces of entire stories that play out in trials in the Superior Court.

Exhibit maintenance and processing requires ongoing training and care for the materials. Courtroom clerks receive annual training in handling biohazardous materials. Among other precautions, policies exist that require batteries be removed from conducted energy devices (tasers) and that ammunition be secured apart from weapons. Weapons or items that contain biohazardous material and other exhibits are carefully "bagged" and meticulous documentation is kept if and when these items can be removed from their protective coverings, usually determined by court order.

The exhibits department is one duty and mandate that the Clerk's approximately 600 employees in six regional areas carry out every day to support the Superior Court's activities.

Reminder: Law, Justice and the Holocaust Webinar

In cooperation with the Holocaust Museum and the Arizona Supreme Court, the Clerk's Office is a participating location in the Law Day presentation of "Law, Justice, and the Holocaust: What You do Matters," a statewide webcast. Dr. William Meinecke from the Washington, D.C. Holocaust Museum will speak on Friday, April 30, 2010. This program explores how the justice system failed Germany prior to and during World War II. A panel discussion with local experts will consider the lessons learned from this period in Germany's legal history, the prospects of this happening again, and whether safeguards are in place to prevent such events in America. This presentation explores how decisions made by individuals really do matter.

The legal community is encouraged to participate in this webinar from 11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at various locations around the state or at the Clerk's administrative offices in downtown Phoenix, located at 620 W. Jackson St., Suite 3017. Check with your bar association or the state's Administrative Office of the Courts for details.