

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

Rock, Paper, Signatures

Is Romance Recession Proof?

The time it takes to save for an engagement ring may have increased in recent years, but the number of marriage licenses the Clerk issues has held steady. Between 2007 and 2013, the Clerk's Office processed an average of 137 marriage licenses on Valentine's Day each year. Not all licenses result in new marriages, but Valentine's Day remains the highest volume day for issuing marriage licenses.

The number of marriage licenses issued on Valentine's Day by year: 2007-138; 2008-115; 2009-143; 2010-156; 2011-163; 2012-117; 2013-130. Several couples who might have applied for their license on Valentine's Day in 2012 got their licenses sooner to allow them to be one of approximately 100 couples who were married by the Chief Justice on the steps of the Arizona Courts Building in coordination with Arizona's Centennial events last year.

Clearing Out the File Room

You haven't had to practice law or handle court records for very long in Maricopa County to remember going to the Clerk's records center, filling out a form and waiting in line to look at or get copies from the only original paper case file, assuming the file wasn't checked out to a judicial division at the time of your request. The Clerk's Office started scanning paper documents in earnest for cases initiated in 2002 and by 2007 the electronic image of all scanned documents was designated the official version.

Thanks to a back-scanning project, the Clerk's two-block-long records facility is looking a little more open. Scanning has allowed the office to remove 144 shelving units that once held an estimated 108,000 paper case files. The converted images of the case records are now stored in the Clerk's electronic repository. Although this progress has resulted in eliminating shelves, there is much more work to do in such a large space.

The Clerk's electronic repository is protected by multiple backups and conforms to international record keeping and management standards. Audits and quality checks involved with scanning ensure a highly reliable system. This repository makes it possible to view documents online, at public access terminals in court facilities around the Valley, and to efficiently transfer information between courts and government agencies.

Adobe Digital Signatures

The Clerk's Office recently became aware that users of the ECR Online may find a very small percentage of eFiled documents appear suspicious due to a signature message attached to pleadings signed with a digital signature. The originator of a PDF document

has an option to include an Adobe digital signature, which is recognized by Adobe Reader and Adobe Professional. Anyone using the Clerk's ECR Online to view a PDF document that contains an Adobe digital signature will see one of several messages dealing with digital signatures, depending on how Adobe preferences are set on the individual's computer. Examples of the messages are: "*At least one signature has problems,*" "*At least one signature requires validating,*" and "*At least one signature is invalid.*" These messages result from the way digital signatures work, requiring the reader of the document to "trust" the signer before the message will disappear.

The Clerk's eFiling and review system currently processes these filings without issue, regardless of whether the filing was submitted through AZTurboCourt (civil) or through the Clerk's eFiling Online website (criminal, tax, and family). However, when viewing these documents through the Clerk's ECR Online, individuals using an Adobe Reader, and possibly non-Adobe PDF Viewers, will see one of the warning/error messages listed above, making it appear there is something wrong with the underlying document.

The Clerk's Office discourages use of an Adobe digital signature on PDF documents filed in Superior Court. In addition to the warning messages that are created by using this signature format as stated above, remember that documents submitted for filing in either MS Word or PDF must be signed using the "/s/" convention as prescribed in Arizona Supreme Court Administrative Order 2011-140, Section (5)(a)(i), and in the eFiling Guidelines posted on the Clerk's website.