

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

The Invisible Clerk

What could be better than climbing on a soapbox, belting out political opinions, railing against mandates, and jockeying for position and relevance in a 24/7 media world? In a clerk's office, just about anything would be better. Political, opinionated, and even ornery are aspects that should be left out of a clerk's office. Opinions and strong positions have a time and a place, but they should always be focused on improving the people's business.

Clerk's office staff take seriously their obligation to verify, assist, inform, and explain. Many of our customers never see a judge, or they only have brief and infrequent hearings. New employees and seasoned staff alike are reminded that Clerk staff are seen by some as the face of the justice system in Maricopa County. A party's perspective on the entire court system can hinge on the interaction they have at a file counter or the first telephone call they make. Many deputy clerks spend years answering the same question day after day, year after year, remembering that it is the only time that individual customer will ask the question. Clerk staff withstand pleas for legal advice and a barrage of demands while staying steadfast in their mission to assist and inform without giving one side an advantage over another. These interactions take place around the Valley, in all case types, and from all sides.

Maricopa County enjoys the fourth largest population in the United States. For the Clerks' office, this translates to more than 650 employees in more than a dozen buildings throughout the county. These few hundred people process millions of pages of documents and millions of dollars in fees, restitution, bonds, and exhibits. They support dozens of judicial officers, tens of thousands of customers, and hundreds of thousands of filed documents. The office has come a long way from its paper origins and will continue finding ways for technology to improve both speed and accuracy. However far technology moves us away from personal interaction, there will always be clerks to solve problems that technology can't. The Clerk's office will remain a haven of equality and fair interactions for those who feel they are in a storm of litigation and discontent.

It is an honor and a privilege being part of a team that is dedicated to public service, and we are all fortunate that the clerk's work does not grab headlines. Steady improvement, strategic planning and forecasting, and dedicated customer service are the hallmarks of a functioning clerk's office. When things go well, the public doesn't think about the Clerk's office at all. And from that perspective, we hope to remain the invisible clerk.