

Program to save city thousands

New technology at court reduces postage, storage

Trish Bennett- Circleville Herald, Ohio
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A project that began two years ago to cut down on storage space in Circleville Municipal Court has recently transformed into a valuable resource for local attorneys and law enforcement agencies.

According to Rob Reeser, municipal court clerk, Judge Gary Dumm has provided access to scanned images of court documentation for use by the legal community through a secured Internet connection.

The move, Reeser said, is not only a timesaver for agencies and court personnel but also is expected to save the city thousands of dollars in postage, paper and storage fees.

The system, called Kwiktag, scans original court documents and stores them in the court's computer system, eliminating the need for mounds of paperwork and the physical space required to store it all.

The scanned case files have proven their worth already with county attorneys, according to Mike Hess, president of the Pickaway County Bar Association.

"I know the Bar is very excited about it," Hess said. "It saves our clients a lot of money not having us leave our office to travel to the courthouse and make copies. It also saves the court staff a considerable amount of time not having to find and copy files for attorneys all day long."

Chief Wayne Gray of the Circleville Police department said the system has proven valuable for law enforcement as well.

"If we need to track down records or convictions, we always had to do a public records request, and that takes time," he said. "Now that information is at our fingertips."

His department is also included in the licensing agreement for the Kwiktag system, Gray said, so booking and arrest records will eventually be added into the database.

"We'll be adding all our booking information for the last 30 years," he said. "Right now, we have a room downstairs filled with records, and there's just no room for any more. The licenses purchased were made available to us, too, so we'll be doing the same thing with our records."

The process of scanning the booking folders into the system will take a year or more to complete, Gray said, because the work must be done by the department's current staff. Once completed, though, it will work hand in hand with the municipal court's system.

If the system works out as well as it has begun, Dumm said he can see it benefiting any agency in Pickaway County.

"I don't know if people realize the sheer volume of paperwork that comes through this court," he said. "If it works for us, it will work for anyone."

Reeser said the court began scanning images of case documents because of a change in laws governing the length of time records must be retained in the system.

Municipal courts across the state are required to retain Driving Under the Influence case files for 50 years, he said, and criminal and traffic cases must be archived for 25 years.

Reeser said the municipal court processes an average of 15,000 cases per year. In just 10 years, that figure results in millions of individual documents for an estimated 150,000 cases.

No taxpayer money was used to purchase the equipment or build the database, Reeser said. The money for the system was raised through a \$9 charge in court costs for each case processed through the municipal court that is earmarked for court technology.

The Internet connections are secured by firewalls and secure log-ins, he said, so the system is inaccessible to the general public.

The information is backed up daily, and there is a disaster recovery plan in place to restore the files if the system is somehow compromised.



Rob Reeser (seated), court clerk, works with Judge Gary Dumm on the Kwiktag case imaging system at the municipal court.