

The Charlotte Clerk's Office, a year in reflection

When I ran for Charlotte County clerk of court in 2016, I promised to immediately construct and implement office improvements which would make the Clerk's Office more user-friendly for local citizens while at the same time saving money for our local taxpayers. Since taking office in January 2017, I have worked tirelessly to fulfill these promises. I am proud to report the following new programs and efficiencies in our office.

Your clerk's office developed a state-of-the-art online Jury Management System, which provides convenience and efficiency for citizens who receive a jury service summons in the mail. In addition, our team developed the myJuryServices app which is the first app in the state of Florida available at both the Apple App Store and Google Play.

Prospective jurors can now check-in online after receiving a jury summons notice. For those who may need to seek excusal from jury service, we have provided a new online juror



Clerk of Court

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excusal request program which is quick and easy to use.

Finally, for those who do serve on a local jury, we now offer same day pay. You receive your daily juror service stipend the same day you serve, in cash. Not only do our jurors receive payment the same day, rather than waiting for a check to arrive in a few weeks, but our office saves substantial taxpayer money by eliminating staff time in cutting checks, as well as postage and envelopes for thousands of jurors per year.

Your clerk's office established a free Property Fraud Alert Program which informs Charlotte County property owners of any official record transaction filed against their name

via an email notification program. This new online services tool is a fraud prevention program designed to better protect an individual's property from fraudulent activity. This program, which takes only seconds to sign up for and is completely free of charge, complements our vision for enhanced communication for property owners in Charlotte County.

Our office also updated our official records public website to allow citizens to print copies of recorded documents without a watermark from their home or business computers free of charge.

As reported in the May 3, 2017, edition of the *Sun*, your clerk's office was singled out as the primary reason the planned \$36 million Justice Center expansion project was reduced to a \$16.8 million rearrangement of existing space project, saving local taxpayers approximately \$19.2 million. As a result of your clerk's office's advances in our digital document program, our

office was able to give up physical space to other court agencies which were in need of additional space in the Justice Center, thereby eliminating the need to expand.

Charlotte County Commissioner Chris Constance kindly stated, "I don't think that enough focus has been placed on (Clerk of Courts) Roger Eaton, the fact that he has given up space to make this happen."

Our budget request for 2017-2018 to fund board services decreased by \$62,000, or 1.9 percent, as compared with FY 2016-2017's request, even with health care costs rising by 5 percent and rising Florida Retirement System rates. Additionally, at year end 2017, I was able to return \$363,416 to the Board of County Commissioners. This was only the second year since the 2008 recession that our office returned funds to the board and to the taxpayers of Charlotte County.

On the comptroller side of our office, our team analyzed the current

structure of investments while continuing to provide security, safety and liquidity of the county's investments. Coupled with rising interest rates, in general, we were able to shift a sizable portion of very liquid funds into more U.S. government agency securities and instruments, earning a much better yield.

Over \$4.9 million was earned on investments controlled by your clerk's office in 2017, as compared with \$3.6 million earned in 2016, an increase of 37 percent. In addition, we further diversified our liquid assets by shifting some funds into a different investment trust pool, further minimizing risk.

I am also proud to report that your Clerk of Court's Office was awarded the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association for the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2016. This is the 31st consecutive year your clerk's office has received this

prestigious recognition in government accounting and financial reporting.

My office will continue developing new and innovative ways to provide a better service experience for local citizens, while at the same time reducing the burden to local taxpayers. While I am very proud of our accomplishments in 2017, I will not rest on them. As I continually tell my children, there is always room for improvement. Throughout my term as your clerk of court, our office will always strive to find new, unique techniques which make our office easy to use, convenient, efficient, and at less cost to our local taxpayers. I look forward to reporting to you this time next year on our 2018 calendar year improvements.

For more information about our office and to access all of our new features, please visit us at CharlotteClerk.com.

Thank you.

Roger D. Eaton is the clerk of the circuit court and comptroller in Charlotte County.