

Clerk's Office provides low cost services

OPINION

After winning the Charlotte County Chamber of Commerce's Business of the Year Award in 2021, the Charlotte County Clerk of Court's office didn't rest on its laurels in 2022.

This past year's primary focus was providing better, more efficient, and convenient services to all Charlotte County residents. In early 2022, we held a special passport event which helped families juggling hectic work and school schedules by providing extended office hours for processing passport applications and taking free passport photographs.

Later in the year, we then launched a self-help legal section of our website offering litigants without attorneys legal forms to use in their cases. We also teamed up with the Charlotte County Legal Aid Society to provide free 20-minute legal consultations for pro se litigants. Additionally, we increased hours in our Murdock passport office so Port Charlotte and Englewood residents could more conveniently apply for and receive their passports.

The last time a Clerk's office branch existed in Englewood was 2009, almost 15 years ago. Listening to our local citizens, we responded by opening a new, state-of-the-art Clerk's office branch in Englewood this year, which provides all our West County citizens more services and convenience. Dedicating this office to the Englewood community, as well as enhancing our online services, resulted in a nomination for "Excellence in Business" by the Englewood Chamber of Commerce.

Throughout 2022, our marriage license office offered holiday-themed weddings. Valentine's Day, Halloween, Fall Festival, and Winter Wonderland were all represented this year, and the couples married during our holiday-themed weddings truly enjoyed their special day at the Clerk's office.

Our office not only accepts its responsibility for providing high quality services to our community, but it also feels an obligation to be a helpful community partner within Charlotte County. Through bake sales, raffle auctions, and pet food donations, as well as a program which allows jurors to easily donate their juror pay to a local charity rather than collect it, the Clerk's office provided monetary assistance to local

in taxpayer funds to the Charlotte County Board of County Commissioners this year, despite rising staff health care costs and increased Florida Retirement System (FRS) rates. Since taking office in 2017, the Clerk's office has returned over \$2.8 million in taxpayer funds to Charlotte County.

As the steward of all Charlotte County funds, the Clerk's office has an awesome responsibility making sure that all funds are both safe and invested wisely. During 2022, at its highest point the Clerk's office we managed a Charlotte County investment portfolio of \$882 million, which earned \$6.3 million for the year. Since I took office in 2017, over \$39 million has been earned on county funds controlled by your Clerk's office.

Despite the many unique challenges brought about by Hurricane Ian in 2022, the Clerk's office increased the number, efficiency, and convenience of its services, all while reducing its budget and returning budget funds to Charlotte County and supporting our local non-profits. Since my first election in 2016 my goal has always been finding ways to provide better, more efficient, and more convenient ways of providing services to our citizens, while still reducing our budgetary costs. Hard work and an excellent staff has made this lofty goal attainable each and every year.

I look forward to continuing this successful trend in 2023!

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



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Charlotte County Clerk of Court

non-profits totaling over \$24,000 in 2022. In addition, we extended our community outreach and donations to Meals on Wheels of Charlotte County, Virginia B. Andes Community Clinic, the Center for Abuse and Rape Emergencies (CARE), Animal Welfare League of Charlotte County, and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Charlotte County.

In 2022, for the sixth straight year since I was first elected in 2016, the Clerk's office reduced its budget – this year by 1.8% — without eliminating the number or quality of services we provide to local residents.

As a result, your Clerk's office returned \$794,533

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