



**Harris County
District Clerk's Office
Annual Report 2015
District Clerk Chris Daniel**

From the District Clerk



District Clerk Chris Daniel

During my fifth year as district clerk, the District Clerk's Office honed and perfected the civil and family e-filing process, modernized and made the courts more efficient by creating a system that allows judges to sign orders electronically and continued to demand that employees be courteous and customer service-oriented.

I am especially proud of the e-signature pad system. It has reduced the lag time between a judge's signing a paper order and the scanned image of that order appearing on the District Clerk's online system. My aim is to provide the most up-to-date document filing system and improve access to records. Our motto at the DCO is that government should make sense – and save cents.

The sooner that the Harris County courts are modernized, the better. The state Criminal Court of Appeals has not yet mandated that the Harris County criminal courts must accept only electronically filed documents from lawyers. But that mandate should be coming soon.

Rather than wait for the mandate to be issued, Harris County should be proactive and begin to convert the criminal courts into e-courts (that is, nearly paper-less operations) immediately. The District Clerk's Office awaits only funding from the county to execute its detailed plan for carrying out this conversion. There's no reason to procrastinate. When the conversion is complete, the Harris County courts will be fully modernized.

My mom is a Dutch-American who has close relatives in the Netherlands. Maybe because of her – and because I also love to travel – I know how difficult it can be to get a passport or have a passport renewed. Not trying to take a shot at the postal service, but the lines for passports at some post offices can be ridiculous.

For that reason, I launched a passport service in 2013 at the DCO's downtown office. Service there is quick and efficient. In 2016, I plan to open satellite passport offices in Harris County's distant suburbs. Suburbanites will no longer have to drive into the city to access the DCO's hassle-free passport service!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Daniel". The ink is dark and the signature is written on a light-colored background.

Chris Daniel



Our mission

To provide the judicial system and the public with information and support in the most technologically advanced methods possible by:

- Fulfilling our statutory duties as record custodian and fee officer to the best of our abilities;
- Fostering an environment for our employees that encourages the development of new ideas and the willingness to improve productivity;
- Implementing our goals and objectives with the team approach and decision-making at all levels of the organization;
- Striving to be a leader and example to other county and state agencies.

The District Clerk's Executive Board



Seated are: Assistant Director of Application Development Tracy Hopper, left, and Criminal Bureau Director Anna Worthy. Standing are: Assistant Director of Communications Bill Murphy, left, Assistant Director of Network Services Mark Combs, Financial Services Director Jack Downing, Human Resources Director Darlene Johnson, Chief Deputy Kevin Mauzy, Civil Bureau Director Debbie Bucko, Executive Counsel/Accounting and Finance Bureau Director Paul Coselli and Quality and Compliance Director Robert Nolen.

DCO runs efficient civil e-filing operation, prepares for criminal e-court conversion

In 2015, the District Clerk's Office improved electronic filing in the civil and family courts and prepared to convert the criminal courts into electronic courts.

Under District Clerk Daniel's leadership, the DCO continued this year to be in the vanguard in the move towards electronic courts. Our office perfected programming that steers electronic filings submitted through a state e-portal to land in the civil and family courts where they were intended to land.

The District Clerk's Office created a system that allows judges to sign orders electronically. The e-signature pad system has greatly reduced the lag time between a judge's signing an order and the order appearing in the DCO's online system.

Meanwhile, the District Clerk's Office continues to urge the county budget office to provide funding so the lengthy process of converting criminal courts into electronic courts can begin.

District Clerk Chris Daniel said, "Undertaking a massive process like converting courts into e-courts is never easy. I'm proud of what my office has achieved.

My programmers have done stellar work to help filings get where they need to go. My civil and family clerks have adapted to a whole new way of keeping court records. We have a good system, and we're working to make it more efficient each day."

In December 2012, the state Supreme Court mandated that Harris County and the other most populous counties in the state accept only electronic documents from lawyers as of January 2014. Civil and family lawyers, and paralegals and law office's administrative assistants are becoming more comfortable using the state mandated-electronic filing system.

In 2014, 1.45 million civil and family e-filed documents were submitted to the DCO. In 2015, that number is projected to rise by 9 percent to 1.59 million. Under District Clerk Daniel, the number of e-filed documents at the DCO has tripled since 2010.

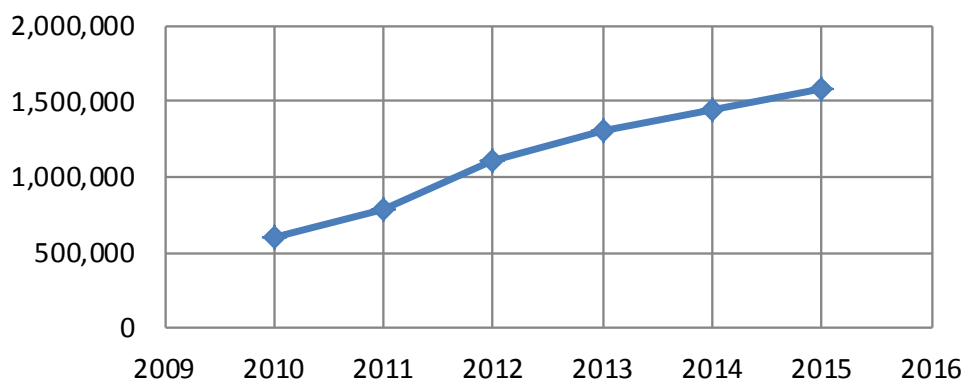
District Clerk Daniel has been strongly urging the county budget office to provide \$2.5 million-\$2.7 million to

convert the criminal courts into electronic courts.

"The District Clerk's Office successfully implemented the civil court mandate. But the state Supreme Court didn't give us enough time to be as fully prepared to meet that mandate as we would have liked," District Clerk Daniel said. "The DCO doesn't want to wait until the state Criminal Court of Appeals hands down a mandate for the criminal courts. We can carry out a smoother, more efficient conversion if we begin the process in the upcoming months. Why procrastinate?"

The funding sought by the DCO would go for buying computers, printers and other equipment needed in mostly paper-less courts; imaging and indexing millions of pages of criminal documents; and hiring temporary workers needed to carry out the imaging project. District Clerk's programmers would write the code needed to allow e-filings to be categorized correctly and reach designated courts.

Electronically Filed Civil and Family Documents



Projected for 2015

District Clerk Daniel makes plans to expand passport service to suburbs

District Clerk Chris Daniel launched a passport service in 2013 because he drove by a number of post offices where people were waiting in long lines to get passports.

The District Clerk's passport service has been hugely popular with customers – they routinely praise the operation for its fast and friendly service – and it provides some property tax relief for homeowners by putting money into the county coffers.

Based on how well the operation has been received, District Clerk Daniel is preparing to launch satellite passport offices in Harris County's distant suburbs in 2016.

"The longest lines I've seen for passport service are at post offices in some suburbs," Mr. Daniel said. "Try getting a passport at the Humble post office. You have to wait a month before they'll see you."

The DCO is hoping to be allocated space to expand its passport service in county annexes. Among the locations where the service may be offered are: Humble, Clear Lake, Cypress and the county annex on Clay Road in west Harris County.

The service likely would be offered one day a week at suburban locations, with a clerk rotating among the satellite offices.

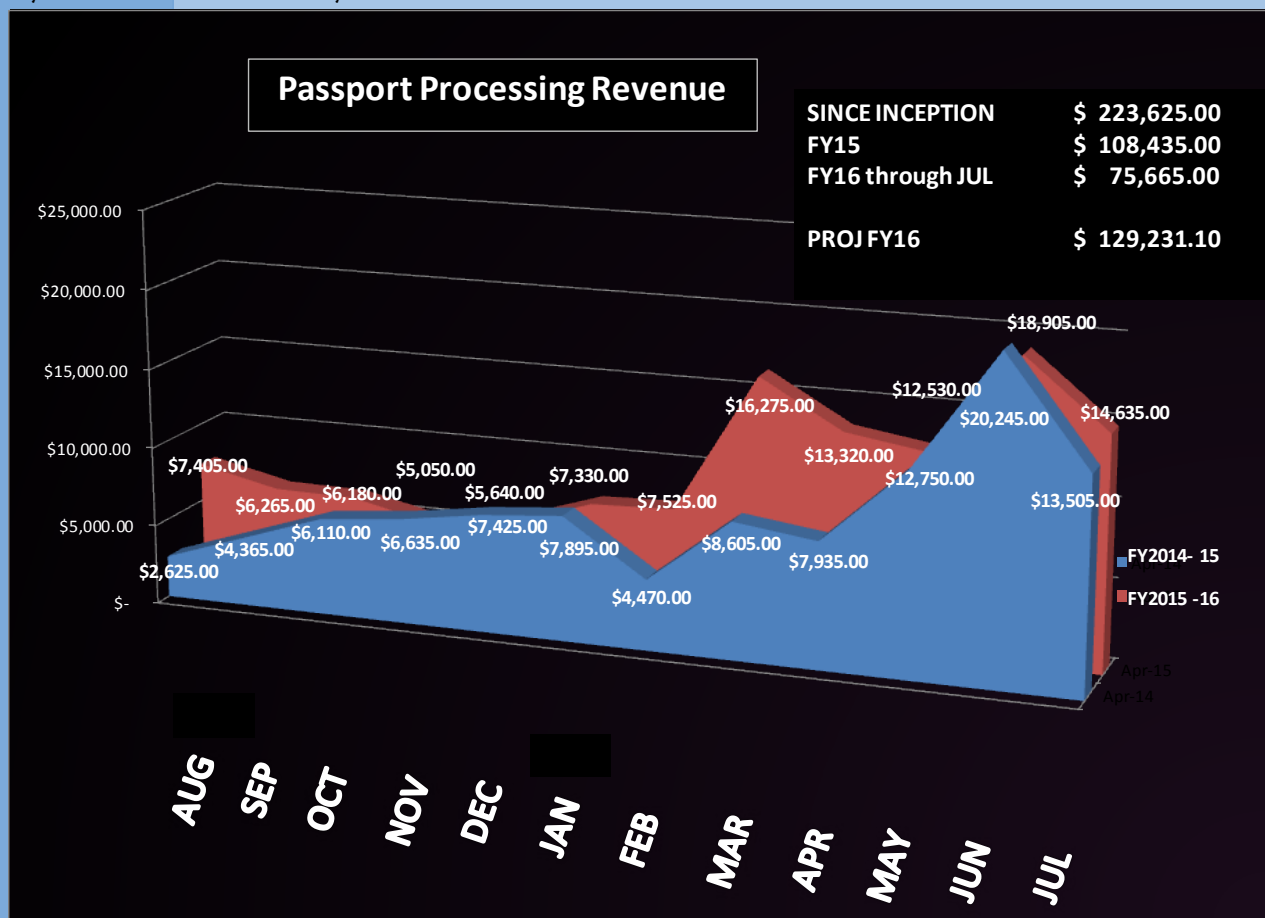


"As we all know, Harris County is vast," Mr. Daniel said. "These offices would save people a trip downtown."

County revenues from processing passports are projected to increase 19 percent in Fiscal Year 2015-16, rising to more than \$129,000.

Since the passport operation was launched, it has brought in more than \$223,000 for the county.

DCO Accounting and Finance Bureau Director Paul Coselli said, "The passport operation has been profitable and filled a need. Other places that provide passports often are busy doing other things. I have a friendly staff that succeeds in helping citizens and strives to assist customers quickly."



DCO hosts state clerks conference

Despite flooding on Memorial Day that forced a change in hotels and despite a second storm that rolled in - Tropical Storm Bill - during the event, District Clerk Chris Daniel and County Clerk Stan Stanart successfully hosted the annual statewide conference of district and county clerks in June.

Several hundred county and district clerks and their top administrators attended the County and District Clerks Association of Texas Conference June 14-June 18, the first time the conference was held in Houston since 1926.

Conference attendees said District Clerk Daniel and County Clerk Stanart worked some magic to pull off such a suc-

cessful gathering given that flooding at the Memorial Day storm doused Houston. The Omni cancelled upcoming events, including the state conference, because of flood damage.

Daniel, Edwards, Director of Quality and Compliance Robert Nolen, Civil Director Debbie Bucko, HR Director Darlene Johnson, Quality and Compliance Manager Kristy Caraway Brown and many others worked long hours in the two weeks before the conference started to stage it at the Royal Sonesta. Contracts had to be reworked. Events had to be planned for different rooms with different spaces.

The conference went forward even though Tropical Storm Bill reached landfall while it was under way. The storm did not strike Houston directly, limiting damage and flooding in the area.

District Clerk Daniel said, "So many staff members who volunteered went above and beyond the call of duty. We overcame obstacles that cropped up and put on a good show."

Seminars were held on how to keep clerk offices operating following disasters, how to improve e-filing operations and how to preserve historic documents held by clerk offices. At the conference banquet June 17, Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick delivered the

keynote address.

Moore County District Clerk Diane Hoefling, immediate past president of the clerks' association, said, "The Houston-Harris County conference was one of the best conferences I have attended. The education was very informative, and I was especially impressed with the Harris County staff and its professional attitude and willingness to help. I enjoyed the banquet and band."



At the conference, sales people pitched wares useful to those in the document retention business.

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Harris County Clerk Stan Stanart, left, and District Clerk Chris Daniel stand at attention as Hope Johnson sings the National Anthem at the conference awards banquet.



Conference members mingle outside the

ference for first time since 1926



Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick delivered the keynote address at the conference banquet.



A late May storm caused flooding in a tunnel leading to the Jury Plaza - and flooded out the hotel that was to host the conference.



District Clerk Chris Daniel stands beside a photo of the county and district clerks conference in 1926, the last time the event was held in Houston before 2015.



banquet hall before the awards banquet.

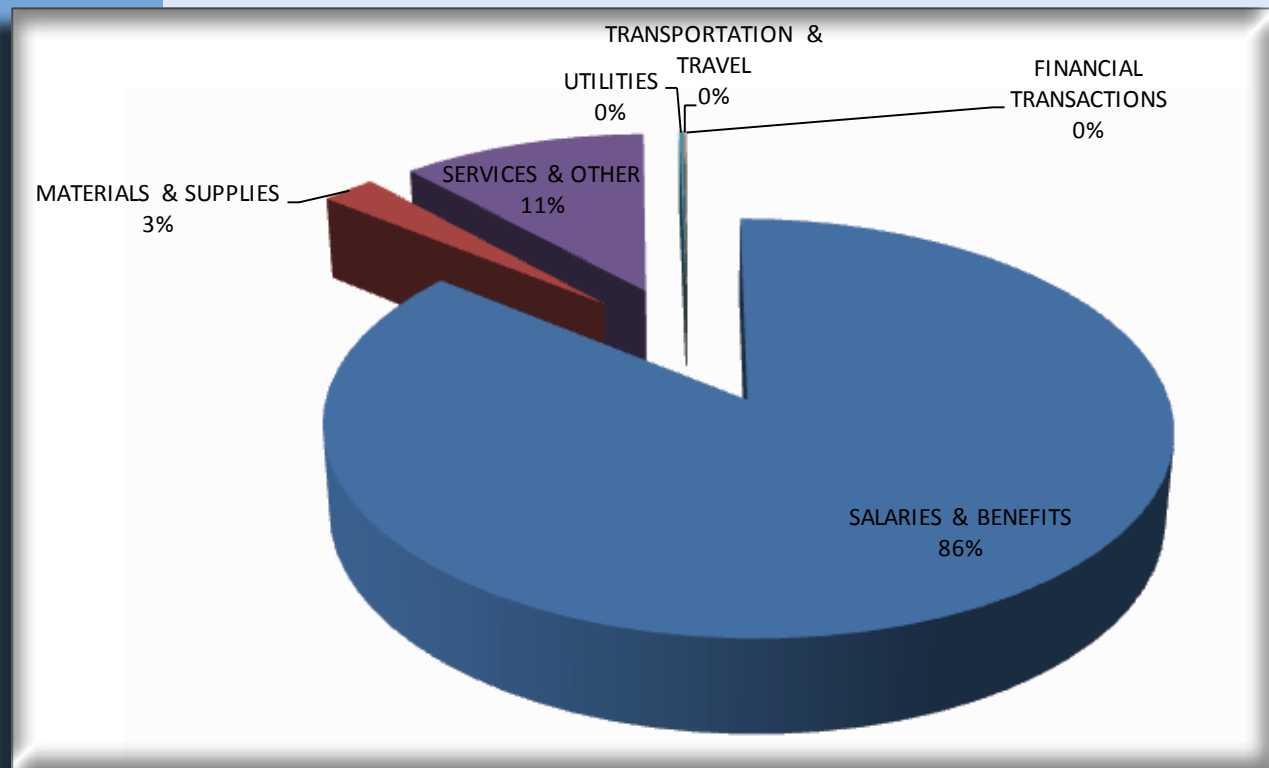


State Sen. Paul Bettencourt spoke at the banquet.

DCO financial summary

	FY 2012-2013		FY 2013-2014		FY 2014-2015	
	ADJUSTED BUDGET	EXPENDITURES	ADJUSTED BUDGET	EXPENDITURES	ADJUSTED BUDGET	EXPENDITURES
SALARIES & BENEFITS	\$22,592,692	\$22,505,321	\$24,734,058	\$23,478,034	\$26,396,597	\$24,484,998
MATERIALS & SUPPLIES	\$714,856	\$542,882	\$684,646	\$533,482	\$892,766	\$716,668
BUILDING & EQUIPMENT	\$-	\$-	\$72,108	\$-	\$36,834	\$-
SERVICES & OTHER	\$3,815,828	\$2,784,352	\$3,657,568	\$2,825,593	\$4,361,510	\$3,229,831
UTILITIES	\$129,100	\$100,799	\$85,000	\$73,104	\$85,000	\$57,176
TRANS. & TRAVEL	\$25,000	\$11,243	\$25,000	\$18,477	\$26,010	\$17,912
FINACIAL TRANS.	\$20,000	\$13,776	\$20,000	\$36,504	\$40,000	\$16,820
TOTAL	\$27,297,476	\$25,958,373	\$29,278,380	\$26,965,194	\$31,838,718	\$28,523,405

Fiscal Year 2014 -2015 Expenditures



DCO unearths more historic court cases; Bacarisse, Davidson feted for preservation efforts

In 2015, the Historic Documents Room continued to improve as more noteworthy cases were unearthed from the archives and volunteers from the Tejas Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution continued to index the oldest documents found in the DCO



At the banquet, former District Clerk Charles Bacarisse and State District Judge Mark Davidson received awards for preserving Harris County's historic court records.

files.

In addition, the two men who led the effort to create the room and preserve the DCO's documents - former District Clerk Charles Bacarisse and State District Judge Mark Davidson - were honored for their efforts. They received awards at the County and District Clerks Association of Texas Conference in June.

District Clerk Chris Daniel said, "We wouldn't have the Historic Documents Room and we wouldn't have preserved our oldest documents without the leadership of Charles Bacarisse and Judge Davidson. The Harris County District Clerk's Office serves as the model for other Texas counties when it comes to preservation of documents."

Judge Davidson, in the 1990s, pressed Mr. Bacarisse to lead the effort after the judge sought a century-old court document and was handed an envelope in which it had turned to confetti.

Bacarisse led the fund-raising effort to create the District Clerk's Historic Documents Room. Law firms, lawyers, individuals and others donated the funds to create the beautiful room on the second floor of the Harris County Civil Courthouse.

During the state county and district clerks conference, out-of-town clerks toured the Historic Documents Room, viewing historic cases in the collection.

Several clerks said they admired Harris County's efforts to keep historic documents from disintegrating.

Among the most interesting cases unearthed from the DCO files this year was the Nelly Norris case. She was a freed slave who battled twice in Harris County courts to preserve her freedom during the late 1830s and early 1840s.

While it is important to preserve documents, they can be difficult to use as a research tool unless an index lays out where to find cases. The Daughters of the American Revolution's Tejas Chapter is helping the DCO create such an index.

The DAR also donated \$500 to preserve a court case that includes a signature from Estevan F. Austin - that's how Stephen F. Austin, known as the father of Texas, sometimes signed his name. The

Tejas Chapter also made two \$750 college scholarships available to DCO employees.

District Clerk Daniel said, "The



Judge Davidson reading a historical document to Martha Ann Hartzog, national and state chair of the DAR's historic preservation committees.

DAR has become a great friend of the DCO. It's a high-energy group of super competent women, and I appreciate all that they do for our office."



On a tour of the DCO's Historic Documents Room, District Clerk Chris Daniel showcases materials to clerks from elsewhere in the state.

District Clerk honors employees

Management Member of Year

Employee of the Year



HR Supervisor Glenda Sanders received the Management Member of the Year award in December 2014. District Clerk Chris Daniel, right, and Chief Deputy Kevin Mauzy announced the award.



Criminal Senior Appellate Clerk Lisa Arriaga was given the Employee of the Year award in December 2014. District Clerk Daniel and Chief Deputy Mauzy gave her the award.

2015 Employees of the Month



Mary Moral
Accounting and Court Registry Team Leader



Lizbeth Sanchez
Family Intake Senior Clerk



Melissa Vargas
Criminal Collections Revenue Clerk



Lizzie Griffith
Criminal Senior Probable Cause Clerk



Sonia Castro
Family Intake Clerk



Sharon Lewis
Family Intake Team Lead



Ann Rodriguez
Family Court Assistant Clerk



Alvera Zamora
Junior Family Intake Clerk



Adriana Nino
IV-D Courts Junior Clerk



Judy De La Garza
Human Resources Coordinator

Looking Forward

New family court to open

A new family court will begin operating in Harris County in January 2016.

The 507th State District Court will be located on the 15th floor of the Civil Courthouse in a courtroom formerly occupied by the 280th State District Court.

The 280th, over which Judge Lynn Bradshaw-Hull presides, moved to the first floor of the Juvenile Justice Center. It hears solely requests for protective orders and did not need a courtroom with a jury box.

Dockets in the nine courts hearing solely family law cases have been growing. At Harris County's request, state lawmakers created the 507th to help handle the burgeoning numbers of divorce and related family cases.

Gov. Greg Abbott will appoint a judge to serve in the 507th. (All the family courts have associate judges, and

the judge of the 507th will choose his associate judge.)

District Clerk Chris Daniel said he hopes that dockets in family courts move more quickly after the 507th opens. "Divorce is a stressful period in people's lives," he said. "The quicker we resolve these matters, the better for the children and the parents involved."

New criminal county-at-law court has been added

A judge will be appointed to preside over Harris County's new criminal court, Criminal Court-at-Law No. 16, early in 2016. The court, which handles misdemeanor cases, began operating in 2015, but a judge cannot be appointed until January.

Other changes:

- The state Attorney General's Office is expected to contract with a company

that will install pay machines where people may make child support payments in cash or with a credit card. The machines likely would be located on the first floors of the Civil Courthouse and Juvenile Justice Center. Users will be charged a fee to make a payment.

- The DCO and the county IT department launched an efficient way for court-appointed criminal defense lawyers to file for payments electronically. The e-voucher payment system will be expanded to include court-appointed lawyers in juvenile cases as early as December 2015. In 2016, the system will be further expanded to include court-appointed civil and family lawyers. The e-voucher system enhances the county's ability to audit and monitor payments to lawyers.

- The DCO will continue to improve electronic courts by enhancing the e-signature process page for judges.

- The DCO will perfect the way that it communicates electronically with the Texas Attorney General's Office on child support cases.

DCO gives boost to future lawyers



After he took office, District Clerk Chris Daniel started a summer internship program for law students. The program helps these students learn some of the nuts-and-bolts about filing cases and meeting court deadlines. In 2015, the interns, all from the South Texas College of Law, were: Calvin McLean, left, Somer Salameh, Christina Stephens and Austin Smith.



Summer 2015 legal intern Laura Lopez



www.hcdistrictclerk.com

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