

October 2020, Issue 10

THE RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE HARRIS COUNTY DISTRICT CLERK



DCOSTRONG



THE RECORDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE HARRIS COUNTY DISTRICT CLERK



Mailed filings stack up each day at Family Intake.



Supervisor Sharon Lewis' team processes up to 740 mail and drop box filings per month during the pandemic.

Family Intake battles huge caseload

Marilyn Burgess

Early last month, Supervisor of Family Intake Sharon Lewis shared some compelling stories about how her section is adjusting to the pandemic. While you might think that work has slowed somewhat due to COVID-19 and the complications it creates, Family Intake has seen a drastic rise in cases.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Family Intake was met with many challenges because the majority of their customers are pro-se filers. Many of these customers are unfamiliar with the e-filing system or don't have access to a computer. So, our Family Intake team had to find ways to offer them services. The section went from a monthly average of 70-80 filings to processing 740 filings per month on average. In August alone, the team handled 743 filings!

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Family Intake battles huge caseload, CONT.

Sharon's team has implemented a system to keep up with every document that comes through the section, working with Civil Intake which sorts the filings received via the drop-box for Family Intake.

In addition, because domestic violence cases have nearly doubled, protective orders have tripled, going from 30-35 cases per month to between 80-100. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the surge of Writ of Attachments and Habeas Corpus has doubled to about 150 issued each month. Before the pandemic, Family Intake would only see a surge in these type of filings at the end of summer break or the beginning of the school year at approximately 80 filings per month.

Child Protective Services cases have also increased from 3-5 issued daily to approximately 10 per day. Each of these services are considered emergencies, and our clerks work diligently to make sure the service is expedited and walked over to the Constable's office by 10:30 a.m. on a daily basis.

To assist with the increasing amount of phone calls received, Civil Services Manager Michelle Gaines was able to give a few employees access to answer calls from home. Ms. Burgess' Executive Assistant Irma Medina and Administrative Assistant Keisha Singleton have also been able to lend a hand. Way to go Team!



The Family Intake Team

Remembering Phyllis Washington: Leader, friend, public servant



Supervisor of Civil/Family Post-Trial Phyllis Washington passed away Sunday, September 27. Ms. Washington had 18 years of experience with the DCO – all of which was spent in Civil/Family Post Trial. She began working here in 2002 and advanced first to Senior Clerk, then Team Lead, and finally to Supervisor in January 2019.

“She was a dedicated, professional public servant and a genuinely nice person. She lead a small, strong team, and her leadership will be greatly missed,” said Ms. Burgess.

“Ms. Washington was a very outgoing person. When I think about her work ethic, excellence comes to mind. She gave 100% percent,” added Civil Services Manager Michelle Gaines. “She researched intensely to find the correct answers and she strived to ensure the rules and guidelines were followed. Ms. Washington also received many acknowledgements over the years for providing superb customer service,” added Ms. Gaines. Phyllis' clerks in Civil/Family Post Trial had similarly compelling memories to contribute.

“My nickname for her was Lady P. She was so caring, always checking on all of us and our families or sharing a good morning smile. She wanted us to be the best we could be,” shared Civil/Family Post Trial Clerk Christopher Dilworth.

“She loved pop culture and celebrities and could tell you anything you might want to know about them. She was a Beyoncé fan. She was very hip while also being quite kind and very serious about her work,” remembered Shemeka Lee, Team Lead of Civil/Family Post Trial.

One coworker who knew Ms. Washington from the beginning of her career at the DCO is Civil/Family Post Trial Clerk Berrie Denson Henry. “During the interviewing process for Ms. Washington, Ms. Darla Turner and I realized her professionalism, her eagerness to learn, and her witty personality would make her a great fit for our team. I have had the pleasure of working with her for approximately eighteen years; she always brought fun and laughter to her teammates. We shared a strong faith.”

Phyllis Washington is survived by children, grandchildren, and one great grandchild. From all of us in the DCO family, may she rest in peace.

Her Celebration of Life will be held October 06, 2020 at the New Hope Baptist Church at 1030 Staffordshire Road, Stafford, Texas 77476. The viewing runs from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. with the funeral beginning at 11:00 a.m.

Recognizing our frontliners

Morgan McAllister

While the DCO has highlighted the efforts of frontline employees throughout the pandemic, in September we held a series of special ceremonies to formally honor these exceptional individuals.



Ms. Burgess, along with her chief deputies, met with frontliners across the DCO to distribute certificates of recognition, as well as personalized coffee mugs with the DCO's new motto: Our work is essential, our service exceptional.



"Our customers appreciate your commitment, and I am so proud to have you on the team," Ms. Burgess told our frontliners when meeting with them. Thank you to everyone continuing to serve onsite during these extraordinary times. 2020 has certainly been a trying year, but your hard work continues to inspire.

News from the District Clerk's Office: A community newsletter

Morgan McAllister

The Communications department works hard to educate the public about the DCO, whether through campaigns encouraging jury participation or social media posts and press releases discussing the latest technologies, policies, and services at the DCO.

Recently, Ms. Burgess asked our department to put together a secondary newsletter for public distribution called News from the District Clerk's Office. The newsletter contains reference information useful to Harris County residents.

For instance, in our first issue we featured the relocation of a child support payment kiosk, shared contact information for different sections, and discussed Criminal Collections' new office in the Criminal Justice Center. The newsletter also helps us feature Judge Mark Davidson's Case of the Month series to a wider audience.

Our initial issue went out mid-September to a variety of community leaders, churches, community centers, local nonprofits, community organizations, and homeowners associations. We encourage you to share the newsletter with your community as well. If you have suggestions for our mailing list, feel free to send them to media@hcdistrictclerk.com.

The newsletter will be released on a quarterly basis going forward and is available under the [Community Newsletter](#) tab of our [Office News](#) page. You can read the September issue [here](#).

Issue 1, September 2020

NEWS FROM THE HARRIS COUNTY DISTRICT CLERK'S OFFICE

How The DCO Impacts You

Marilyn Burgess

Hello Harris County residents: I want to introduce myself to you. My name is Marilyn Burgess and I serve as your District Clerk. I have worked most of my life in the private sector, but I have a passion for public service. For over 30 years, I worked as a CPA and I also held leadership roles at the Texas Parent Teacher's Association and at the North Houston-Greenspoint Chamber of Commerce. I took office in 2019 and I am starting this newsletter to tell you about what our office does and how we can help you.


The District Clerk's Office (DCO) serves several functions that directly impact the residents of Harris County. First, as you may already know, we are responsible for summoning prospective jurors. We are working to modernize jury service through e-Juror, an innovative program that allows for online pre-registration. Other primary functions of the DCO are keeping official records for Harris County District Courts and County Criminal Courts, making these records available to the legal community and the public, accepting filings from the courts, providing authorities with court orders to execute, and preserving historical documents.

Did you know you can even get your passport application processed through the DCO? Our downtown office at 201 Caroline (Suite 170) takes appointments from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. and can be contacted at passport@hcdistrictclerk.com.

Future issues of this newsletter will highlight many more topics and services of use to you and I hope this publication will also help make our office more accessible. Additionally, we will showcase the excellent articles that Judge Mark Davidson, of the Multis District Litigation (MDL) Civil Court, writes for the DCO's internal newsletter. They are interesting pieces about our history that can also help us understand our present. For those who would like to sign up for our newsletter or send questions and comments, please send an email to: media@hcdistrictclerk.com.


Between issues, be sure to check out our [Office News and Press Releases](#)!

Thank you and best regards.



A New Home For Criminal Collections

In August, our Criminal Collections section moved from their temporary quarters in Suite 1026 of the Criminal Justice Center to their new permanent home in Suite 1016. If you would like to stop by to visit, please be sure to schedule an appointment with our team by emailing criminalcustomerservice@hcdistrictclerk.com



Picnicking at the Records Center

Morgan McAllister

The employees at our Records Center have some new picnic tables they can use for lunch breaks and when they need to breath a little fresh air at 5900 Canal. The tables are located along the loading dock just to the left of the building and are clearly labeled "HCDCO." For many frontliner employees still coming to work in person, the tables come at just the right time.

"A few months ago, one of my employees - Alan Acosta - came to me with a suggestion that it might be nice to have a couple of picnic tables out on the dock at Canal since social distancing in their break room sometimes presents the employees with limited space for lunch," shares Sylvia Ocampo Manager for Criminal/Civil Data Control.

"We thought the tables would be great for Houston's cooler fall weather as well. So I went to the Senior Management team, and Ms. Burgess approved it," she adds.

With Houston's weather finally growing cooler after another sweltering summer, now is the perfect time to dine outdoors, enjoy the breeze, and relax. These tables are also great for those who want to take lunch in a more socially distanced fashion.

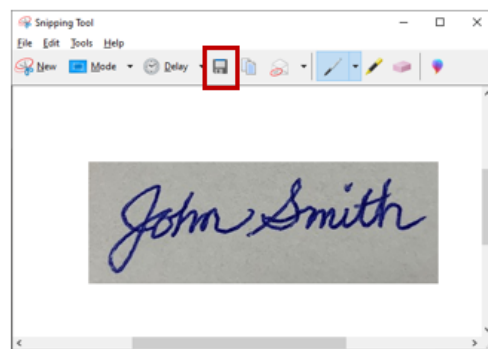
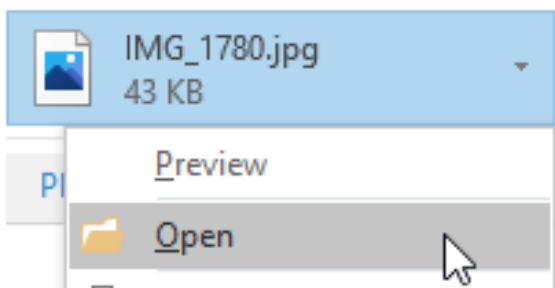


E-Signatures: When and how to use them

Original signatures on timesheets, logs, and other documentation are always preferred over e-signatures to be in compliance with the Auditor's Office requirements. However, e-signatures may be used if an employee is unable to go into the office to sign their paperwork. At this time, this means adding an actual photographed and not a typed font signature. By signing your time sheets, logs and other documents, you are stating that you have read and are confirming the information provided.

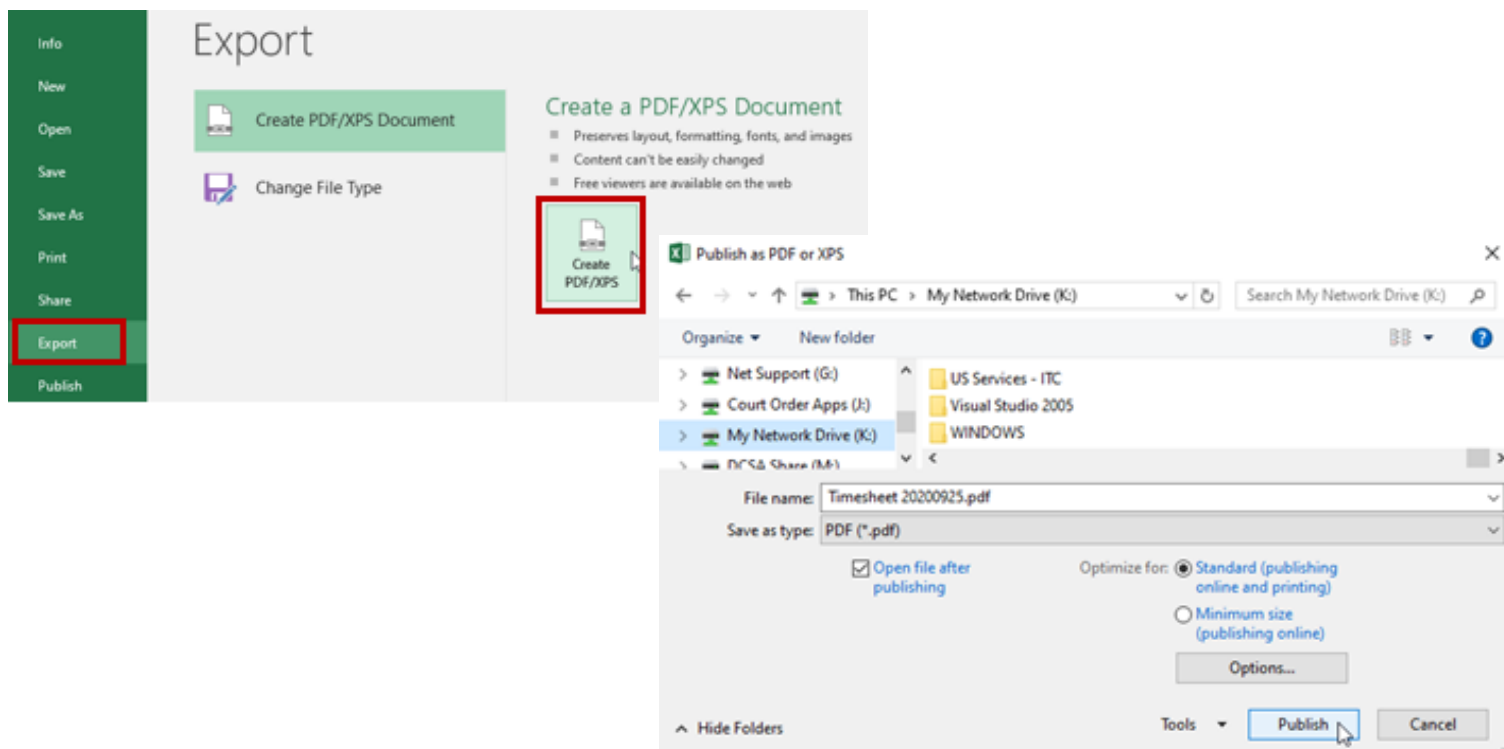
When setting up your e-signature, follow these instructions. For clarification, contact the Help Desk.

First, use your cell phone to take a picture of your handwritten signature and send it to your work email address (@hcdistrictclerk.com).



From your DCO computer, open the email, open the picture, and use the Snipping Tool to crop and save this image to your (K:\) Drive as "Signature.JPG"

When your timesheet is complete and ready for your signature, open it, click on the File tab in Excel, select the Export function, click on the "Create PDF/XPS" button, and publish it to your (K:) Drive as a PDF.

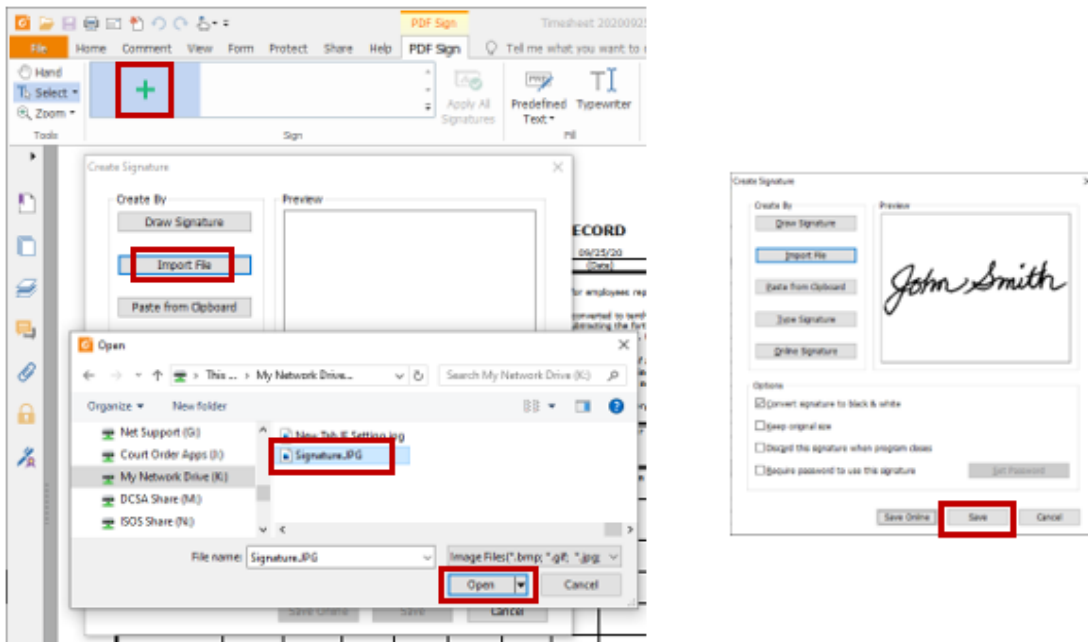


E-Signatures: When and how to use them, CONT.

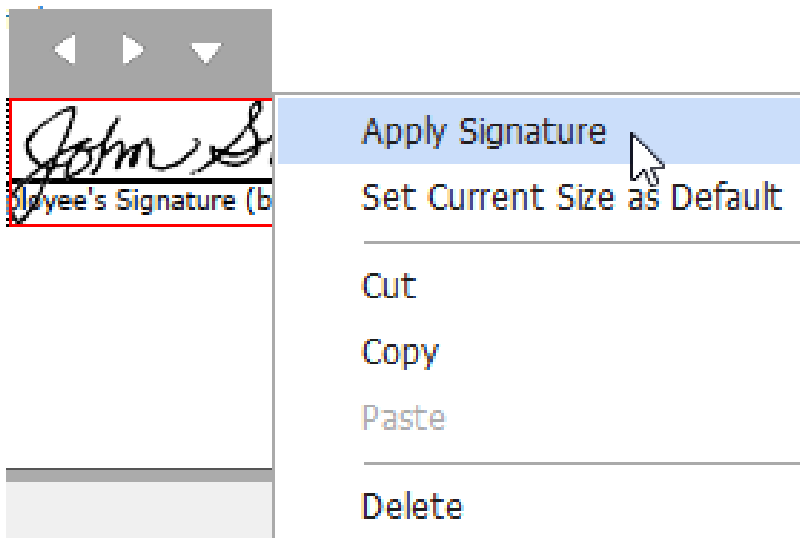
Open the PDF “Timesheet 20200925.pdf” that you just published to your (K:) Drive and click the “PDF Sign Protect” button on the Home tab of the Ribbon Bar to reveal the “PDF Sign” tab shown below.



Click the plus symbol, click Import File select the Signature.JPG file, and click Open. From the Create Signature window, click Save as shown below.



Click NO if you are prompted to install the Spell Check component for Foxit. You may notice that your signature is now floating with the movement of your cursor. Scroll down using the mouse wheel and position your signature on the signature line and click once.



Click and hold your signature to reposition it with the mouse or single-click and use the arrow keys.

Single-click your signature to reveal the drop-down menu and Apply Signature. Save this PDF and print it or email it as an attachment.

KnowBe4 you click

Eduardo Martinez (DCO Network Engineer)

Phishing is the process of attempting to gain access to sensitive information such as usernames, passwords, and other personal identifiers by pretending to be a credible entity. Phishing is usually accomplished by sending out bulk emails to try and avoid spam filters. Outfits of bad actors have grown more sophisticated in their attack methods for deceiving people into clicking on fraudulent links or opening up malicious attachments in emails. In our current times, with most of our business correspondence being conducted through email, phishing has become a serious threat.

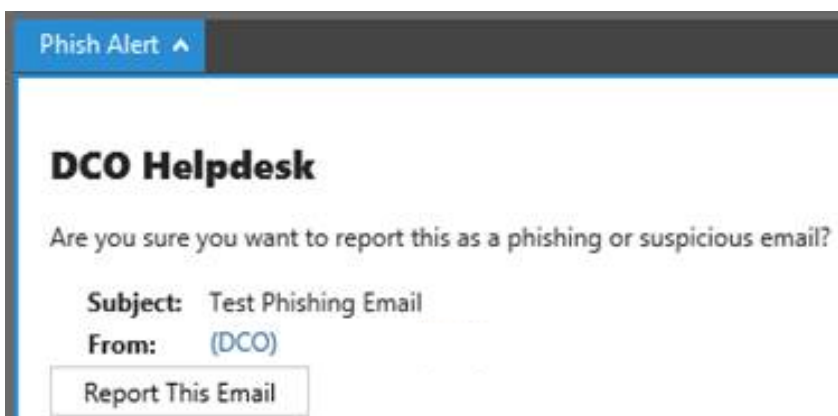
"Phishing is a growing problem in our world and we all need training to make sure we are not the weak link," says Ms. Burgess. "This is not something we are automatically attuned to and it takes training and reminders to think before you click. If one of our over 500 employees clicks on the wrong link – it could be detrimental to the entire office. This training is crucial to defend ourselves from these predators."

To provide greater cyber security awareness, the DCO IT team has partnered with KnowBe4 - one of the world's leading cyber security training organizations. KnowBe4 will allow the DCO to conduct simulated phishing campaigns and security awareness training programs. The goal is to educate DCO Team members in cyber security best practices. Through the training, we intend to create a "human firewall" of empowered users that can see right through a potential phishing attempt and actively report these instances.

To this end, you may have noticed a new Phish Alert button available at the top of emails. This new tool provides clerks with a quick way to report a phishing or potentially suspicious email.

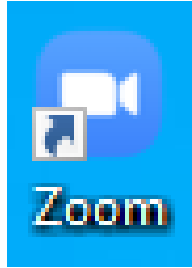
When the Help Desk receives emails submitted in this manner, the emails will be further investigated.

Thank you for keeping the DCO cyber-secure.



How not to use Zoom

John Burnette



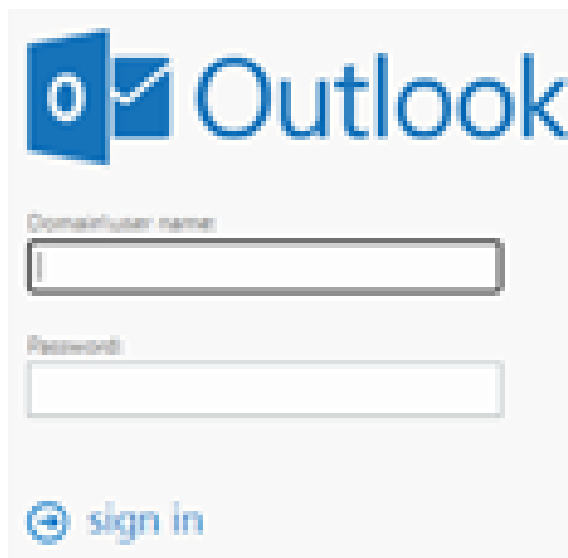
The Help Desk staff has received many calls from clerks working from home reporting issues with sound and/or video during a Zoom meeting. Most of the time, we discover that you are attempting to join a meeting after connecting to the VPN and connecting to your designated work computer using Remote Desktop. Please DO NOT do it this way!

Instead, use this method to join a Zoom meeting:

Log in to your Take-Home PC or personal computer and open Internet Explorer or your choice of Web browser to login to Outlook Web Access (<https://mail.hcdistrictclerk.com/owa/>).

Locate your email invitation to join the meeting and click the link to join. The Zoom app does not need to be installed for you to participate in a meeting.

Hopefully, you noticed that “VPN” and “Remote Desktop” were never mentioned in this method. That was intentional. We recommend that you be completely logged-out and disconnected from those resources prior to joining a Zoom meeting.



Harris County District Clerk's Office

Employee of the Week

Julia Adkins



Julia Adkins is one of our Senior Clerks in Family Intake and our Employee of the Week. She has been with the DCO for five years. "Ms. Adkins is an exceptional employee and possesses strong leadership skills. She is a self-starter who has just about mastered every task within the department. She is always seeking out ways to improve. She also helps to train others within the department, and she is well respected by her co-workers," says Supervisor of Family Intake Sharon Lewis.



Harris County District Clerk's Office

Employee of the Week

Josie Wicks

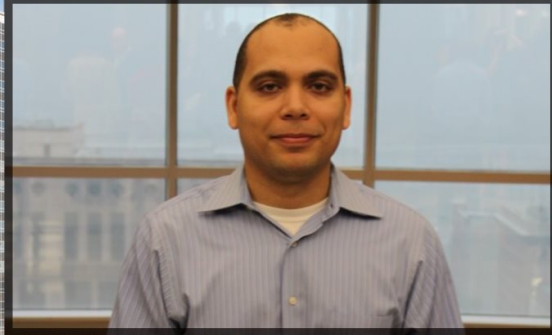


Josie Wicks is one of our Call Center Customer Care Agents and our Employee of the Week! She has been with the Harris County District Clerk's Office for 11 years. "Ms. Wicks maintains a positive attitude and demeanor at all times, despite unforeseen events. During the pandemic, her positivity has been especially helpful," says Call Center Supervisor Marcella Harris.



Harris County District Clerk's Office

Employee of the Week Jajuan Robicheaux

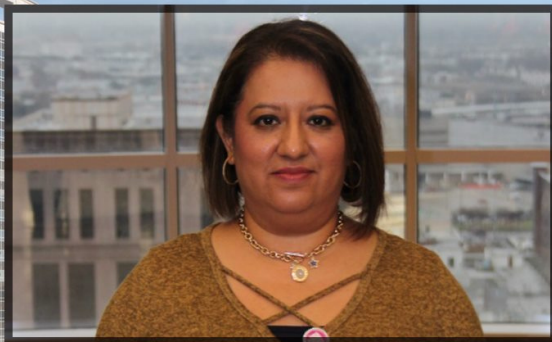


Billing Clerk Jajuan Robicheaux has been with the DCO since 2007. "He is a dependable team player. Recently, we needed someone to make an unplanned visit to the office to move an essential task forward. Mr. Robicheaux accepted without hesitation. He also shined when a number of check validations were assigned towards the end of his shift, saving others the extra work load the following week," says Billing Supervisor Racheal Lucio.



Harris County District Clerk's Office

Employee of the Week Irma Lazo



Senior Jury Clerk Irma Lazo is our Employee of the Week. Ms. Lazo also doubles as Jury's payroll clerk. In her role, she has been essential to the Jury Team's resumption of Jury Assembly. "During this transition, she has been exceptional with handling jurors and organizing the NRG Arena set up," says Jury Manager Aman Ahluwalia.



HR Training Opportunities

In person training is temporarily suspended, but you [can click here for virtual training.](#)

Remember:

You must have approval from your immediate supervisor before scheduling a class. Every full time employee is expected to attend at least two classes per year.

Wellness Program

Virtual Wellness Fair 2020:

Virtual sessions will be held over the course of 3 days ~ October 8th, 10th and 22nd. Registration is coming soon. Visit ww.wellathctx.com for more information.

Wellness Training Harris County offers a variety of wellness classes online for all employees. Log onto the wellness website at www.wellathctx.com for a list of training classes.

Healthy Actions Medical Plan: Check your status to be sure you have completed all of the HAMP requirements by logging onto www.myCigna.com. Remember, October 31st is the deadline to complete your Healthy Actions Medical Plan requirements so there is still time!



October Birthdays

Wishing each of you a joyful and safe celebration!

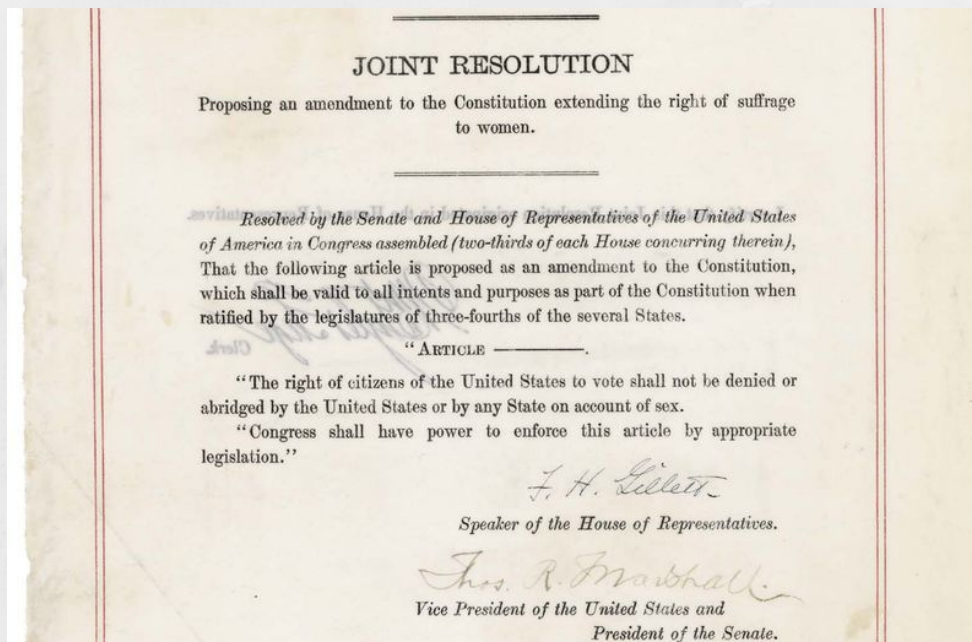
Quinnita Lashaw Strahan
 Edaena Fernandez
 Lawrence Efiom Archibong
 Lashanda Roberts Cambric
 Estella Annette Lane-Orton
 Sabrina Angel Macias
 Marisol Rosas
 Quaninshi Shawa Medlock
 Yolanda Shoals
 Cecily Antoinette Hurd
 Carolina Salgado
 Leslie Ann Charles
 Matthew Rene Frausto
 Hugo Cesar Meza
 Yanelly Martinez
 Ana Iris Treminio
 Jessica Ayala
 Tanisha Deshaye Dublin
 Jasmine Janae Garner
 Yesica Jantes
 Carl Martin
 Lonya Denise Porter
 Lucy Benitez Garza
 Judith Ann Snively
 Milagros Sarahi Torres

Tre'Janae Lewis
 Angellia Patricia Dozier
 Juliean Broner
 Allison Esquivel Eivet
 Alexander Xavier Cordova
 Fabian Delgado
 Jajuan Robicheaux
 Brenda Aracely Espinoza
 Rochu Varkey
 Bedelia Cora Young
 Nidia Leticia Orellana
 Andrea Dee Ayala
 Alexandro Casares
 Sashagaye Shadae Prince
 Jason Matthew Delgado
 Michael T. Jones
 Kenny Perez
 Laresha Kabrenthia Hall
 Makaila Nicole Jefferson
 Clinton Lee Schramek
 Raven Michelle Hubbard
 Cynthia Marie Hernandez



Case of the month: Case of the courageous suffragette

Judge Mark Davidson



19th Amendment of the US Constitution

Next month will mark the 100th Anniversary of the first Presidential election following the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which states that the right to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of sex. The adoption of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution followed a long effort by women and their male advocates for what we today consider a basic right of all citizens.

Long lost in the archives of the District Clerk’s Office and the records of the 80th District Court is a lawsuit that made the theoretical right of women to vote come to reality. Without the effective action by a very skilled attorney and swift action by a judge, women might have had to wait four years after adoption of the Women’s Suffrage Amendment to actually be able to vote. The case is therefore one of significance.

In 1920, Texas required its citizens to pay a poll tax of \$1.00 every other year for the right to be able to vote. The tax was required to be paid before February 1st of the year in which the election took place. The 19th Amendment was ratified by the requisite number of states on August 18th, 1920, and took effect immediately. The problem for Texas women was that they had not been allowed to pay poll taxes before February 1st, and therefore, it was claimed they could not vote in November of 1920. Mrs. Mary F. Hinckley must have been an active suffragette, the activists for womens’ right to vote. Having heard that her precinct’s election judge, E. V. Ley, and all of the other election judges in Harris County, were not going to allow her to vote, she found a lawyer and filed a lawsuit. She did not seek to have the poll tax invalidated. She simply said that since the United States Constitution gave her an unqualified right to vote, she could not be denied that right because she had not paid a tax that she had not been allowed to pay.

Case of the month, CONT.



Hortense Ward

Election Day was on November 2nd, 1920. On October 19th, 1920, a lawsuit was filed seeking a writ of mandamus against her election judge, and all other election judges in the county. Her choice to sue her election judge, and not the State or County, meant that Mr. Ley would have to hire a lawyer to stop her from voting. The presumably greater assets of the government would not be used to pay for attorney's fees to deter women's suffrage, and the costs of defense would have been paid by the election judge.

That is exactly what he did. The attorney for Mrs. Hinckley was the redoubtable Hortense Ward. She was a remarkable woman. In addition to being an active supporter of women's suffrage, she successfully lobbied the Texas Legislature for a bill to allow women to sign contracts without their husband's consent. Later in life, she would lead the efforts to fight the Ku Klux Klan when they tried to take over County Government. In 1926, she would serve as Chief Justice of the Texas Supreme Court for a case by appointment of Governor Pat Neff.

Even though the lawsuit was filed only 15 days before the election, Judge J. D. Harvey, of the 80th District Court, set the matter for a hearing on October 28th. The next day, a three page opinion was filed by Judge Harvey, which declared that since women were allowed to vote, and that the Constitutional amendment had no exception or qualification to that right, then the poll tax was unconstitutional and void. Mrs. Hinckley and thousands of other Harris County women were allowed to vote. It is unlikely women's votes made a difference. James Cox, the Democratic Presidential nominee, won Texas by 36% over Warren Harding. That misses the point, of course. They had been allowed to participate in the most fundamental of rights every American has – the right to vote. Mrs. Hinckley and her lawyer should be remembered as heroes. The file tells us of the story of two strong women who would not give up that right.