



Hearsay

A publication of the Office of Harris County District Clerk Chris Daniel

August 2016

Volume 22, No. 8

DCO fights jury scam with education

SHIELD YOURSELF FROM JURY SCAMS

THE SCAM
Individuals posing as police demand immediate payment for phony fines for missed jury service. Officers and court clerks never make such calls.



- NEVER PROVIDE:**
- Payments (especially on prepaid debit cards)
 - Credit card information
 - Personal information such as Social Security number, birthdate

- TO REPORT THIS SCAM, PLEASE CALL:**
- The District Clerk's Office at 713-755-7300
 - The Sheriff's Office at 713-274-9210

A message from

CHRIS DANIEL
HARRIS COUNTY DISTRICT CLERK



This poster will be displayed in some county offices, including DCO intake areas.

During the last year, a Houston man paid \$7,000 after a caller told him he was being sought on an arrest warrant for failing to pay fines for missed jury service.

A Clear Lake man who received a similar call paid \$1,900 and then sent another \$1,900 hours later when the caller told him the first payment had never arrived.

These two people who made payments were among dozens of area residents who have been victimized by con men who pose as police officers and demand immediate payment if a person wishes to avoid being arrested for phony fines stemming from purported missed jury service.

The District Clerk's Office has launched public awareness efforts and will rely on news releases, posters, public service announcements and media interviews to combat this jury scam. The DCO's Jury Section this year has received an increasing number of complaints from people who have become victims of this scam.

"My heart goes out to these victims," said District Clerk Chris Daniel. "The best way to combat this scam is through education. With information, people can keep from ever becoming a victim. Police officers and court clerks will never ask people to pay fines on the phone. The bottom line is don't give these people your prepaid debit card numbers, your credit card numbers or your Social Security number."

DCO Attorney Charlie Walker has been working with Precinct 1 Constable Deputy Inspector Rick Moreno and Sgt. Ruben Castillo and with a robbery detective at the Harris County Sheriff's Office in an effort to catch the con men.

"Part of the problem is that the people running these scams may be operating out of state or even out of the country," Daniel said.

Typically, the con men order people to pay the fines using a prepaid debit card. They keep victims on the phone until they

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State mandates e-filing of criminal documents in 2017

The state's highest criminal court mandated that the District Clerk's Office accept only electronically filed documents from lawyers starting July 1, 2017.

As a result of this mandate, the DCO will convert Harris County's 38 criminal courts into nearly completely electronic courts – in much the same way that the county converted the civil and family courts into e-courts to meet a similar mandate in 2014.

The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals said Harris County and all other counties with populations above 500,000 must meet the mandate by July 2017. Counties with smaller populations will be given more time.

The court said counties can seek an extension.

At a public hearing in April, the District Clerk's Office asked the Court of Criminal Appeals to give Harris County 18 months



Chris Daniel

to meet the mandate because the county, unlike most other counties, will convert its criminal courts into nearly fully electronic courts. Some counties do not convert their courts, but merely accept electronic

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HR clerk cares for people - and plants and pets



HR Coordinator Brandy Elhommoud, middle, receives the July Employee of the Month award. With her are Chief Deputy Kevin Mauzy, left, HR Director Darlene Johnson, District Clerk Chris Daniel and HR Supervisor Glenda Sanders.

As a volunteer at the Harris County animal shelter, Brandy Elhommoud often works with dogs that have been neglected or mistreated.

In the District Clerk's Human Resources office, she looks after her own plants, but also tends to her colleagues' plants. HR staffers say she has a green thumb.

Elhommoud projects a similar caring, conscientious attitude as a HR coordinator, skillfully advising employees about health benefits and payroll matters.

The DCO's Executive Board named Elhommoud July Employee of the Month for her stellar work as a payroll/benefits clerk.

HR Director Darlene Johnson said, "She is dedicated to details. She is always up on her game and really seems to enjoy what she does."

Elhommoud is also well-regarded by her colleagues. "Brandy always goes above and

Employee of the Month



Brandy Elhommoud

beyond to provide the best quality to our customers when it comes to advising them on payroll matters," said HR Coordinator Anthony Leatherman. "She has a vast amount of knowledge in that area and does whatever it takes to make sure that our internal customers are satisfied with their product."

Elhommoud joined the District Clerk's Office in 2001 as an assistant account clerk in child support. Four years later, she became a clerk in the 311th State District Court, a family court then overseen by Judge Doug Warne.

She said she learned much about the family court system and the law in general during those years.

She had taken some courses at Lone Star College, but while working in the 311th, she began actively pursuing her bachelor's degree at the University of Phoenix, perhaps best known for its online classes.

Elhommoud, however, opted for the college's brick-and-mortar campus at Interstate 10 and Kirkpatrick. "I do much better with an instructor in front of me," she said.

After getting her bachelor's in business administration, she enrolled in Our Lady of the Lake University's MBA program. She attended the university's Houston-area campus every other Saturday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., specializing in human management.

"It was intense. They gave us enough work to fill up the two weeks until we had the next class," said Elhommoud, who graduated in 2008. "I loved school. I enjoyed going."

She had been a runner-up for an opening in Human Resources. When another position opened in late 2008, HR Direc-

tor Darlene Johnson urged her to apply. Elhommoud joined HR in December 2008 and has been there since. Competent and often quiet, she is known in HR for her positive, cooperative attitude.

"She gets along great with everyone and is always willing to lend a helping hand," said HR Manager Amy Conaway.

Elhommoud grew up in north Harris County and still lives there. As a child, there never was a shortage of pets in her home. "We had cats and dogs. We had turtles. We had birds. We had snakes," she says. "Pretty much we had everything we could come home with."

She has never lost her love of animals. She volunteers all day Saturday and on two nights a week at the Harris County shelter. She teaches obedience skills to dogs that otherwise might go unadopted. Some of the animals were mistreated before arriving at the shelter.

"I had a Rottweiler I worked with, Sammy. He had no confidence," she said. "He was absolutely terrified until we started working with him. He just needed the confidence."

After she worked with Sammy, he was adopted.

With her MBA, Elhommoud would seem to have options. But she doesn't plan on leaving the county – she says she loves her colleagues and the DCO.

About Brandy Elhommoud

Are you a reader?

"I read a lot. Historical fiction. I like Philippa Gregory. She writes about kings and queens in England."

Favorite restaurants?

"I like Mediterranean food so I gravitate to where that's at. Olivit's in Spring is a favorite. I don't like cooking."

Are you a traveler?

"I love to travel. I've been to England, Ireland, Dubai, Spain, various places in the States. I'd like to go to Italy. It's a tie between Italy and Austria."

Do you have pets?

"A cat and a dog and usually rescue kittens."

DCO seeks funding to carry out criminal e-filing project

Cont. from Page 1

filings, print them out and file hard copy documents in paper case files.

Harris County officials, including DCO officials, have taken the position that fully electronic courts – not hybrid paper-electronic courts – operate the most efficiently.

During the past year, District Clerk Chris Daniel unsuccessfully urged county budget officials to fund the criminal e-court conversion project. He said the county would be better off starting the project before the mandate was imposed because county officials knew the mandate was coming, but did not know the exact date it would take effect.

Since the Court of Criminal Appeals imposed the mandate June 30, top DCO administrators have been meeting with county budget officials to discuss how the criminal e-court conversion project will be funded.

The DCO supports converting the criminal courts into electronic courts, but wishes that the Court of Criminal Appeals had given it more time to carry out the conversion.

District Clerk Daniel said, “The DCO needs to be given the funding to carry out



The DCO’s programmers will play a key role in getting the office ready to meet the criminal e-filing mandate. Their tasks include creating electronic forms for the many types of documents used in the criminal courts. Assistant Director of Application Development Tracy Hopper discusses the upcoming mandate with her staff frequently, including with IT eCourts Analyst Jay Morgan, right.

the conversion as soon as possible. Otherwise, it will be difficult to accomplish a full criminal e-court conversion before July 1.”

The DCO, he said, supports converting the courts, but wishes that the Court of Criminal Appeals had given it more time to carry out the conversion.

Computers and other IT equipment needs to be bought for criminal courtrooms. DCO IT staffers need to begin writing programming that will allow criminal court documents to land in the correct electronic files.

The state hired Plano-based Tyler

Technologies to create and run the state portal (eFileTexas.gov) through which all civil and family documents must be sent. Documents sent through the portal then are sent to their intended destinations – specific clerk’s offices around the state, such as the Harris County District Clerk’s Office.

All electronically-filed criminal documents also will go through Tyler Technologies’ portal.

The mandate does not require criminal defendants who represent themselves to file documents electronically.

A man was charged with running jury scam from prison

Cont. from Page 1

provide the number on the card that allows the con men to access the money.

Sometimes, the con men give the name of a real deputy who works in the Harris County Sheriff’s Office. Most people are not fooled by the scam. But for the small minority who are, the scam can be costly.

“They catch people who are elderly or law-abiding citizens,” Moreno said. “They say, ‘We’re going to arrest you.’”

Moreno said he has investigated seven incidents in which victims paid \$2,000 to \$7,000 in the past eight months.

The DCO will be putting up posters that warn the public about the scam in the DCO’s public areas. Harris County’s four county commissioners have agreed to display posters in areas frequented by senior

citizens. The District Clerk’s Office also will ask local radio stations to air a public service announcement that warns people about the scam.

Residents who have been contacted by the con men may call the DCO at 713-755-7300 or the Sheriff’s Office at 713-274-9210.

After victims give con men the numbers from the prepaid debit cards, the con men often tell victims to mail the prepaid debit cards to the DCO. The con men provide the DCO’s address.

The con men then tell a victim to put his or her name in the envelope’s return address area plus a code indicating that the money is payment for an arrest warrant for missed jury service. The code that the con men provide often is “BLOODMON33Y.”

Moreno said the con men are just laughing at the victims by using the blood money code.

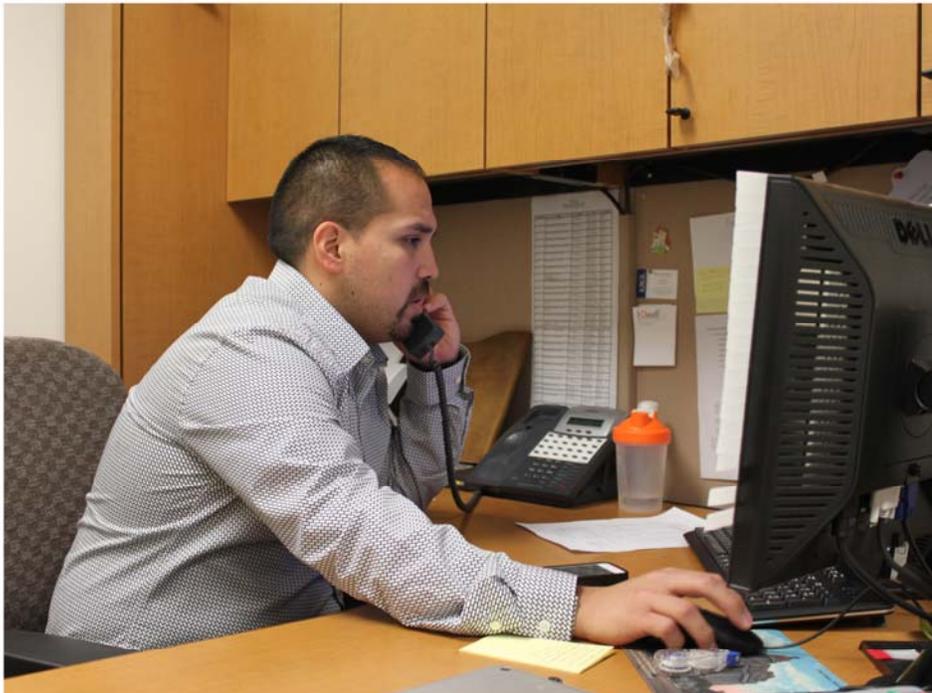
The jury service scam has occurred across the nation.

In Georgia, a man was charged with duping numerous victims out of at least \$10,000 by posing as an officer trying to collect fines for missed jury service. Authorities were surprised when they found out the scam’s base of operations: a Georgia state prison.

An Arizona woman in her 80s was tricked out of \$6,500 by a jury service scam.

Daniel said, “These con men need to be caught, but it’s not easy because they often use disposable phones.”

COURTHOUSE SCENES ... COURTHOUSE SCENES



DCO Ancillary Clerk Jerry Miranda works the phones in his Civil Courthouse office. Jerry's duties include handling requests for temporary injunctions.

Welcome Aboard!



Eduardo Martinez joined the IT Help Desk.

Astros home Monday-Friday schedule in August

- Monday Aug. 1, Toronto, 7:10 p.m.
- Tuesday Aug. 2, Toronto, 7:10 p.m.
- Wednesday Aug. 3, Toronto, 7:10 p.m.
- Thursday Aug. 4, Toronto, 7:10 p.m.
- Friday Aug. 5, Texas, 7:10 p.m.
- Tuesday Aug. 16, St. Louis, 7:10 p.m.
- Wednesday Aug. 17, St. Louis, 1:10 p.m.
- Friday Aug. 26, Tampa Bay, 7:10 p.m.
- Monday Aug. 29, Oakland, 7:10 p.m.
- Tuesday Aug. 30, Oakland, 7:10 p.m.
- Wednesday Aug. 31, Oakland, 1:10 p.m.

Parking may be more expensive when day games are held.

And Another Year Younger!



AUGUST

AUGUST

1 Leslie Hernandez Christopher Sharp	10 Jason Cantu Aurora Contreras Charlie Keys	18 Stephanie Castillo Joseph Lopez Phyllis Washington
2 Roy Broussard Joycelynn Elliott Shanelle Taylor	11 Christina Alarcon Melissa Bonds Pamela Robicheaux Jeanetta Spencer	19 Laura Pruettt 20 Edith Conerly Ronica Steen
3 Karen Torres	12 Jonathan Patton Nancy Ramon Andrea Vivas Ramirez	21 Louis Hernandez
4 Maria Aguilar Danielle Gutierrez Rachel Radley	13 Mary Bahena Talitha Brown Jesus Flores	23 Dawn Hutchings
5 Shelby Manuel Audrey Roquemore	14 Francisca Hernandez Cerda	25 Johvanna Adkins Shantel Cooper Corniesha Johnson
6 Mark Fenity Stephen Kushnerick Sarah Tyler	16 Justin Kitchens Arthur Stubblefield Jr.	27 Marcella Harris
7 Ariel Jackson	17 Tiffany De La Rosa Tamra Marshall	30 Misty Brown Michael Spencer
9 Tonya Keller Mike Perez		



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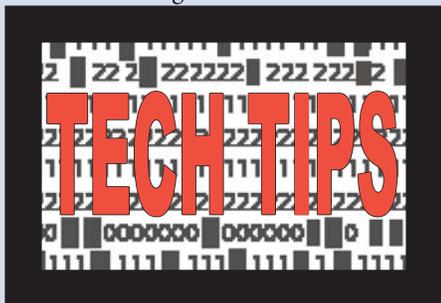
How to keep your computer running well

By Dominique Franklin

DEEDS, ITS, and JIS are web-based applications that are used daily by the District Clerk's Office.

Many times DCO web developers are required to make updates to the files that comprise DCO sites in order to make a change or send a new feature live.

If DCO developers change a file that a staff member's browser has cached, that staff member's computer will keep providing the old, cached version of the file and the staffer won't see the most recent changes.



A staffer then may may encounter browser errors like **run time** errors and buttons missing on the page.

Clearing the cache and cookies in a browser

can help resolve these types of problems. So clear your cache and cookies.

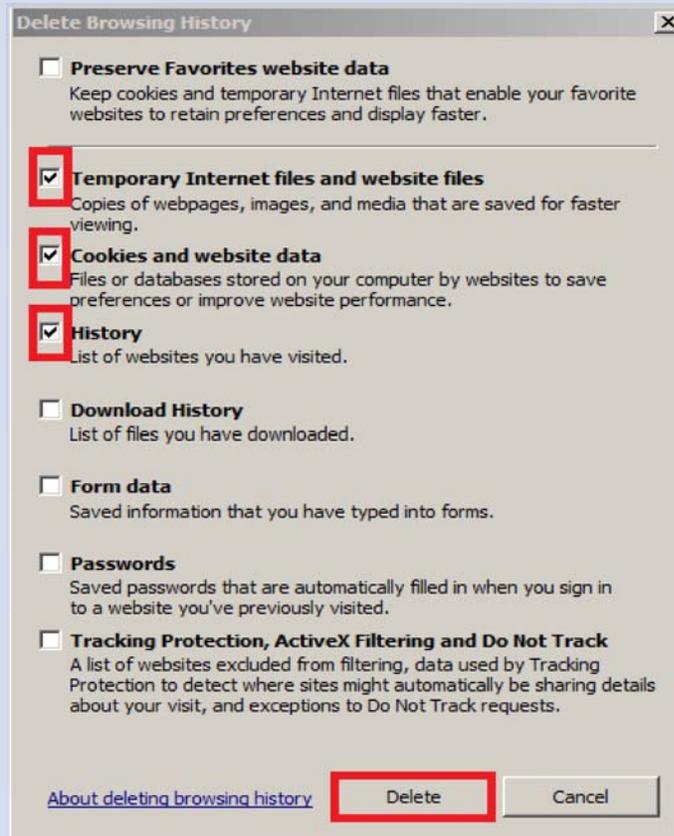
Here are the steps to clear your cache and cookies in Internet Explorer 11:

1. Open Internet Explorer.
2. Next, hold down CTRL+SHIFT+DELETE.
3. Make sure the options are checked in the graphic seen to the right, then select delete.
4. Click the delete button.
5. Wait a few seconds and then you will see at the bottom of your web browser in a pop-up (see below) that the browser history has been deleted. Close your current browser sessions.

Internet Explorer has finished deleting the selected browsing history.

6. Open a new browser session to access DEEDS, ITS or JIS. If you're still experiencing performance issues with these web-based applications, please email or call the Help Desk for further assistance.

7. Finished.



Dominique Franklin is a member of the DCO's Help Desk.

COURTHOUSE SCENES ... COURTHOUSE SCENES ... COURTHOUSE SCENES



The DCO's IT Department celebrated Assistant Director of Network Services Mark Combs' marriage with cake last month. Among those at the office party were Administrative Assistant Delia Nehri Macias, left, and Disbursement Officer Araceli Carrizales.



DCO Court Registry Clerk Alicia Villagomez answers a customer's question in the Court Registry on the first floor of the Civil Courthouse.

Respecting cultural differences is key to effective workplace communication

The following is Part 2 of a multi-part story in which the author provides 10 tips on effective workplace communication. The next parts will run in subsequent months. The whole article may be found at:

<http://money.howstuffworks.com/business/starting-a-job/10-tips-for-effective-workplace-communication.htm>

By Stephanie Watson

Tip No. 8: Respect Cultural Differences

In 1992, while touring Australia, former President George H.W. Bush flashed the peace sign to some farmers.

What he didn't realize was that in Australia, his well-intentioned message was the equivalent of giving the finger.

President Bush's mistake makes for a funny anecdote, but in the workplace, a similar kind of cultural faux pas could lead to far more serious implications.

The world is shrinking. Companies not only hire foreign employees, but they also work with more colleagues abroad. As a result, management needs to be culturally sensitive and aware of the subtle differences in the way people of different nationalities interpret words and gestures.

Companies need to create an environment that's understanding of, and sensitive to, the needs of all their employees, no matter what their culture or religion.

That includes providing kosher or veg-

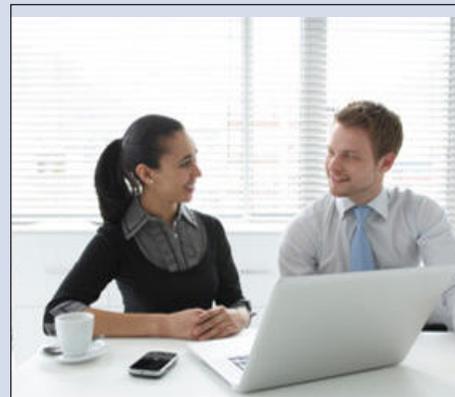
etarian options in the cafeteria, allowing employees to take time off for religious holidays, and providing sensitivity training to help staff members gain a better understanding of and appreciation for all of their co-workers.

Tip No. 7: Give good feedback

If you like your employees' work, let them know it.

No employee wants to exist in a vacuum. Whether they're working tirelessly to get projects done or slacking off, your workers need to know that you recognize and appreciate their efforts -- or expect them to work harder.

You don't have to hold regular meetings to share feedback, although that's one way



to do it.

There are many other ways to let your employees know what you're thinking -

Training Corner

Each month in Training Corner, DCO Senior Training Specialist Marcella R. Harris passes on training and business-related advice she has found on the web.

through e-mail, phone calls, or a brief status update a couple of mornings a week.

When you do give feedback, make sure it's as clear and detailed as possible.

Try to offer solutions if there is a problem. For example, don't just say, "You aren't putting in enough effort."

Instead say, "When you are late three weeks in a row filing your budget reports, it gives me the sense that you don't have enough time invested in your accounting procedures. Can you let me know why you've been late and how we might help you get back on track with these reports?"

Don't forget to give positive feedback, too.

Praise and recognition make employees feel important, which motivates them further.

Take your team out to lunch to celebrate a sales milestone, get key employees gift certificates to say thanks for a job well done, or just tell them, "You did a great job on that presentation. Good work."

COURTHOUSE SCENES ... COURTHOUSE SCENES ... COURTHOUSE SCENES



The Employee Appreciation Committee held a DCO Bistro spaghetti fundraiser last month. Volunteers included Child Support Supervisor Racheal Lucio, left, Court Registry Supervisor Cecily Hurd and Civil Courts Supervisor Jessica Moir. Not pictured is IT Projects Manager Mindy Hamrick, who cooked 70 pounds of spaghetti over three nights for the fundraiser.



Not just DCO staffers come to fundraisers. Marvin Batres, a probate clerk in the County Clerk's Office, pours cheese on his spaghetti.