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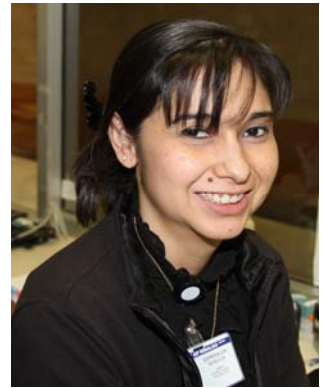
Year: 2013

Laura Hinojosa

Hidalgo County

District Clerk

The Faces of Public Service



www.co.hidalgo.tx.us/districtclerk



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Celebrated the first week of May since 1985, Public Service Recognition Week is time set aside to honor the men and women who serve our nation as federal, state, county and local government employees and ensure that our government is the best in the world. At the Hidalgo County District Clerk Office, “the best” is precisely what we strive to achieve.

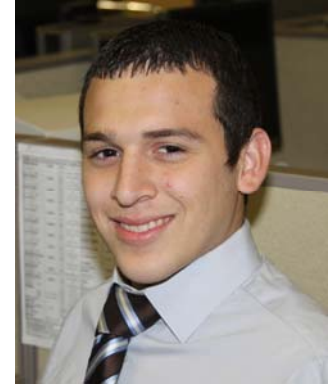
New or old to the office, all district clerk employees have taken an oath and “solemnly swear” to “faithfully execute the duties of the office” and “preserve, protect and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States and of this State.” And it is this common pledge that unites, not only our staff, but all public servants, to serve and protect this great country. In our case, this pledge is also a reminder of our duty to maintain the integrity of the judicial records we are charged to index and secure.

Day in and day out deputy district clerks work tirelessly to assist the courts and judicial system in obtaining timely disposition of court cases. A sometimes arduous and tedi-

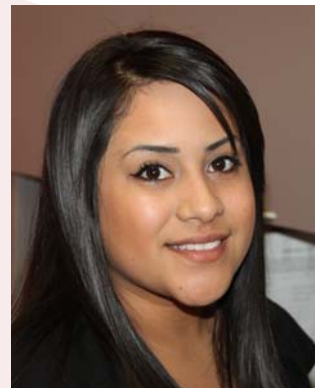
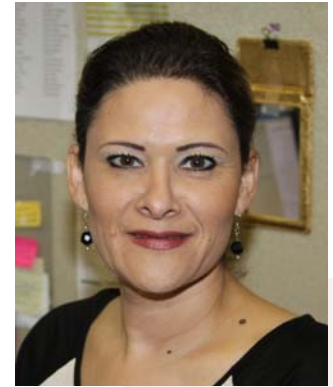
ous task, deputy district clerks receive both civil and criminal documents for filing and processing in all court cases, ensuring proper and accurate record management so that they are easily retrievable for public information; preserved for permanent storage and archives; and disposed of according to law.

The list of duties is ongoing and the work is constant and year-round. During a time when budget cuts are prevalent at the local, state and federal levels, recognizing employees for their public service is the least we can do. For it is they who continue to tackle the day-to-day challenges, which remain despite scarce resources and the need to do more with less.

At the district clerk office we honor our staff members for their time, work and effort in getting things done. We are dedicated to adhering to the highest standards of public service that emphasize professionalism, courtesy, and excellent customer service as we continue to learn and evolve.



“ Day in and day out deputy district clerks work tirelessly to assist the courts and judicial system in obtaining timely disposition of court cases. ”



Standing Pretrial Orders - Hailstorm Claims

On June 17, 2013, a Supplemental Order assigned the 206th District Court to handle all pretrial matters for residential and commercial property insurance cases filed in the District Courts of Hidalgo County that involve insurance disputes arising out of hail storms that struck Hidalgo County on or about March 29, 2012 and April 20, 2012. Standing Pretrial Orders previously assigned the 93rd and 370th District Courts, in addition to the 206th. The Supplemental Order is in force and effect, unless otherwise modified by court order.

The Supplemental Order and previously issued pretrial orders can be accessed on the district clerk webpage at:

<http://www.co.hidalgo.tx.us/index.aspx?nid=1446>

On our webpage you will find:

- Standing Pretrial Order: Residential Hail Claims
- Standing Pretrial Order: Commercial Hail Claims
- Order Assigning Cases for Pretrial: Residential & Commercial Hail Claims
- Supplemental Order Assigning Cases for Pretrial Matters Concerning Hidalgo County Residential and Commercial Hail Claims—Signed on June 17, 2013

ALL COURT FILINGS IN THE HIDALGO COUNTY HAIL CLAIM LITIGATION MUST BE E-FILED

MDL Cases

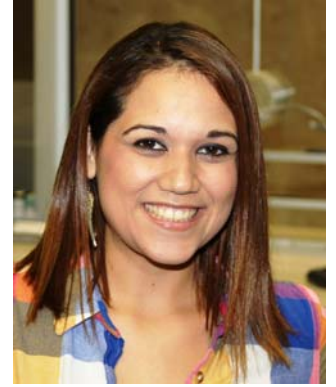
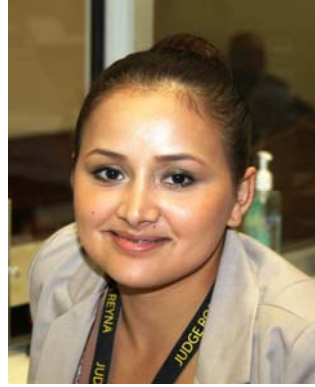
The 206th District Court has issued Orders related to MDL Hailstorm Cases. A copy of the Orders can be accessed on the district clerk webpage at:

<http://www.co.hidalgo.tx.us/index.aspx?NID-1465>

On our webpage you will find:

- NO. MDL-13-0123 - Order Plaintiff's Motion To Stay Trial Court Deadlines
- NO. MDL-13-0130 - Order Plaintiff's Motion To Stay Trial Court Deadlines
- NO. MDL-13-0123 - First Amended: Order Plaintiff's Motion To Stay Trial Court Deadlines
- NO. MDL-13-0130 - First Amended: Order Plaintiff's Motion To Stay Trial Court Deadlines

Pursuant to Rule 13.5, Subsections (d) and (e) of the Texas Rules of Judicial Administration, any notice of "Tag-Alongs" and/or Notice of Transfers must be accompanied by a civil filing fee in the amount of \$237.00.



“ For it is they who continue to tackle the day-to-day challenges, which remain despite scarce resources and the need to do more with less. ”



HB 349 - Criminal Case E-filing by David A. Diaz

Hidalgo County is on the way to being the first in Texas to allow attorneys in all criminal cases to file pleadings and documents electronically – known as e-filing – under legislation approved by the Senate on Wednesday, May 22, said Rep. Terry Canales, D-Edinburg, the author of the bill. Sen. Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa, D-McAllen, is the Senate sponsor of Canales’ House Bill 349, which already has been approved by the House of Representatives. Once signed into law by Gov. Rick Perry, Bill 349 would go into effect on September 1, 2015.



HB 349 is designed to improve the delivery of justice in Hidalgo County, reduce costs to county taxpayers, attorneys and litigants, and take advantage of the latest technological advances in the state’s legal system.

“Courts have long been burdened with processing paper, a problem that continues to grow exponentially and largely unabated,” said Canales. “After more than 165 years of processing traditional filing, Texas Court Clerks are awash in the state’s judicial paper trail. Electronic filing offers a means to stem the paper tide.”

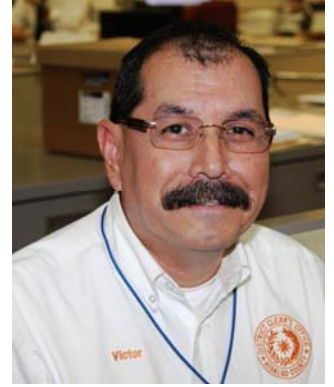
The Texas Supreme Court has ordered that civil cases — including those in family, probate, county, and district courts — be filed uniformly and electronically by 2016, Hinojosa explained. Electronic filing for criminal cases has lagged behind civil cases in Texas. Currently no parties in a criminal case can digitally file court documents in Hidalgo County.

“Filing physical documents is both time consuming and environmentally wasteful. District clerks are burdened with the inordinate amounts of paper stacking up on their desks. While electronic filing is an option for all counties, it is up to the discretion of the courts to implement an e-filing system,” Hinojosa said. “HB 349 requires Hidalgo County district courts to allow parties to electronically file court documents. This will save Hidalgo County money and move it into the 21st century, becoming a model criminal court system for other counties to follow.”

According to Canales, HB 349 is endorsed by Hidalgo County Judge Ramón García, Hidalgo County Clerk Arturo Guajardo, Jr., and Hidalgo County District Clerk Laura Hinojosa. Laura Hinojosa, daughter of U.S. Congressman Rubén Hinojosa, D-Mercedes, testified earlier in the spring before the House Committee on Judiciary and Civil Jurisprudence in support of the e-filing measure. Laura Hinojosa has developed expertise in e-filing for the courts system as a member of the Texas Judicial Committee on Information Technology (JCIT), which studies methods to simplify judicial procedures, expedite court business, and better administer justice, Canales said (*continued on pg 6*).



“ At the district clerk office we honor our staff members for their time, work and effort in getting things done. ”



HB 349 - cont'd.

She noted that the Texas Supreme Court has already ordered the full implementation of electronic filing for all civil cases in Hidalgo County by January 2014, so the infrastructure is already being set up to allow for e-filing for all criminal cases.

“There shouldn’t be any fiscal impact (costs),” she testified. “We will be ready to go in January 2014 with civil e-filing, which is the mandate of the Texas Supreme Court. I believe Hidalgo County will be ready for criminal e-filing by the date set by Rep. Canales (September 2015).”

The House District 40 Democrat noted a passage from Texas Chief Justice Wallace Jefferson’s “State of the Judiciary Speech” on March 6, in which the Republican leader impressed the need to move to electronic filing. “Our courts operate much like they did in 1891 with paper, stamps on paper, cabinets for paper, staples, storage, shredding of paper,” Canales quoted Jefferson. Canales agreed with Jefferson’s concerns that “one of the more intractable barriers to justice is antiquity.”

During his speech before state lawmakers on March 6, Jefferson also noted “with e-filing, document storage expenses for court clerks decrease. Staff that formerly spent time sorting and file-stamping paper can be assigned to higher-skilled tasks. Important court documents are less likely to be damaged or lost. Attorneys can file their pleadings across the state without the need to master various filing systems. And litigants can more quickly access documents online.”

Canales added there would be some start-up cost, but ultimately the new system will save money for the county government. There would be no cost to the county government to use the e-filing system for civil or criminal cases, and there would be no cost to litigants who are too poor to pay for the service, he added.

Also under his legislation, Hidalgo County could still allow traditional paper filing as well. But, Canales predicted, the future is at hand. “As Chief Justice Wallace Jefferson said, ‘The era of big paper is over,’ Canales said.

Note: HB 349 was signed into law on June 14, 2013 and becomes effective September 1, 2015.

Child Support Newsflash



In May the Texas Attorney General, Child Support Division, announced that Western Union is currently not accepting child support payments and counties should direct child support customers to use other methods of payment by visiting <https://www.oag.state.tx.us> or www.moneygram.com.

This is a reminder that CVS, Walmart, Albertsons and Money Box locations are MoneyGram agents and should accept child support payments. If any locations claim they are not MoneyGram agents, send the store information, i.e. store name and address, as soon as possible to: csd.newsflash@texasattorneygeneral.gov. Customers must include case numbers and cause numbers when using MoneyGram.



“ We are dedicated to adhering to the highest standards of public service that emphasize professionalism, courtesy, and excellent customer service...”



National Butterfly Center Check Presentation



District Clerk Staff presented a check in June totaling \$3,200 to the National Butterfly Center as part of their Blues for Bucks Workplace Fundraising Campaign to benefit local charitable organizations. Located in Mission, Texas near the Rio Grande River, the National Butterfly Center is committed to connecting people, plants, and the “winged wonders” that pollinate and propagate all that grows around us. The Center showcases live animals and plants, in wild and cultivated settings, with educational exhibits to enhance human understanding and appreciation of the parties and processes that create beneficial and sustainable ecosystems.

“Receiving this special contribution from the staff at the Hidalgo County District Clerk’s office is wonderful,” asserts Marianna Trevino-Wright, Executive Director of the Center. “And it could not have come at a better time! Summertime in the Rio Grande Valley is stressful for plants and animals, not to mention our equipment and employees; so this gift is greatly appreciated and will be put to good use. We hope to return wonder for wonder, by recognizing everyone who participated with a permanent bed in our ever-growing garden.”

The district clerk office kicked off their charitable efforts in 2008. The program, which allows staff to wear jeans every Friday in exchange for a \$5 donation, has since then expanded their efforts through the creation of a “charitable organizations list” of which staff randomly selects a recipient every six months. Over the past four years the district clerk office has collected over \$33,000 which has gone to local charitable organizations throughout Hidalgo County.

“Giving back is the least we can do as public servants and as members of this community,” said Hinojosa. “I’m glad our staff is able to contribute in a small way to organizations like the Butterfly Center that rely on community support to continue doing the wonderful work they do.”

The National Butterfly Center is open to the public, for visitors and members, seven days/week. To learn more about the National Butterfly Center, and how you can join us, visit www.nationalbutterflycenter.org, or call 956.583.5400. Your annual membership or charitable gift impacts the beauty of our community and helps preserve the biologically diverse, natural treasures of deep South Texas.

The Official E-filing System for Texas



The Texas Supreme Court has mandated e-filing in all civil cases, including family and probate cases, by attorneys in appellate courts, and in all non-juvenile civil cases, including family and probate cases, by attorneys in district courts, statutory county courts, constitutional county courts, and statutory probate courts. The order sets out a schedule for implementation beginning with the most populous counties in January 2014, which includes Hidalgo County.

TexFile is the official e-filing system that will allow attorneys and litigants to initiate new cases and file subsequent pleadings and documents online - anytime, anywhere - in a secure and cost-effective manner. This means most of the business of Texas courts will be conducted in a paperless environment.

E-filing allows attorneys, paralegals, and other filers to:

- Select the service provider of your choice and register free-of-charge
- Submit court documents online to any participating court
- Have your filing fees automatically calculated for you when you submit filings
- Receive filing status updates via email
- Get a file-stamped copy upon the clerk's acceptance

Attorneys/filers are encouraged to visit www.texfile.com to access additional e-filing information such as:

- Upcoming online training dates and registration
- Training videos for filers as well as user documentation
- Texfile overview presentation (by David Slayton at State Bar Meeting) available for download
- Transition information such as e-filing key dates/information and e-filing FAQs
- Other related links: Existing e-filing providers, Supreme Court Mandate, Press Releases

Key Dates:

September 1, 2013

If you are currently e-filing with the existing Texas.gov system, your transition to TexFile will occur between September 1, 2013 and February 28, 2014.

January 1, 2014

Mandatory e-filing takes effect for the 10 most populous counties in the State. The TexFile team along with OCA will be reaching out to those counties to ensure a smooth transition.

March 1, 2014

All counties not already e-filing can begin the implementation of TexFile. This implementation will be driven mainly by the Supreme Court mandate schedule.

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Office Hours

Monday—Friday

7:30am—5:30pm



Please visit our website! Whether verifying fees, responding to your jury summons, or accessing case and passport information, you will find all the information you need here:

www.co.hidalgo.tx.us/districtclerk

We also encourage your honest assessment of our services as we continue to evolve and improve through your valuable input. Email your comments to: districtclerk@co.hidalgo.tx.us



District Clerk Honored by HCBA



The Hidalgo County Bar Association honored on May 10, 2013, Hidalgo County District Clerk Laura Hinojosa with the *Liberty Bell Award* at the 2013 HCBF Law Day Gala. The Liberty Bell Award is presented to a non-lawyer who has excelled in his/her efforts to help instill a better understanding and appreciation of the law, our system of government, and the rights and responsibilities of our citizens.

“I am honored to have been selected as this year’s recipient of the HCBA Liberty Bell Award,” said Hinojosa. “The recognition is a true testament to the time, work and effort my staff has invested in enhancing policies and procedures and capitalizing on technology to provide efficient and responsive government services. I accept this award on behalf of the entire district clerk office.”

Other awardees included Morris Atlas who received the HCBA Lifetime Achievement Award, Viola Garza, recipient of the Ethics Award, Carlos Moctezuma Garcia, recipient of the John E. Cook Pro Bono Award, and Jerry Lee Berg, recipient of the HCBA Media Award.

Legislative Update

During the 83rd regular session, legislators filed over 6,000 bills. However, only about 1,450 of them ultimately passed. A considerable number impact county government. Visit the Texas Association of Counties at www.county.org for legislative highlights. TAC is also releasing a more comprehensive analysis of county-related legislation later this summer. The County & District Clerk Association of Texas also released a legislative update specific to clerks at www.cdcatexas.org.