



# Laura Hinojosa

## Hidalgo County District Clerk

### Do you have your Passport? We can help...

By the end of the first quarter, there will be sixty-one days until the U.S. government implements the full requirements of the land and sea phase of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), a result of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004.

On June 1, 2009 U.S. citizens entering the United States at sea or land ports of entry will be required to present a passport, passport card, or other travel document approved by the Department of Homeland Security. The goal of WHTI is to strengthen U.S. border security while facilitating entry for U.S. citizens and legitimate foreign visitors by providing standardized documentation that enables the Department of Homeland Security to quickly and reliably identify a traveler.

Hence, it is our goal to provide US citizens in our community with convenient, complete, customer friendly passport services in anticipation of the changes in travel requirements. From February through March 2009 the district clerk office processed a total of 1,111 applications. In an effort to better serve the public the district clerk office certified an ad-

ditional forty clerks as passport agents in addition to implementing Saturday passport clinics. The clinics were scheduled to make these services more accessible to the community, particularly working families who otherwise might not be available during county business hours. The clinics will be conducted every other Saturday beginning April 18th

through June 2009 on the 1st floor of the county courthouse from 9am to 3pm. Otherwise, we encourage the public to visit our office during normal passport service hours from 9am to 3pm, Monday through Friday. Appointments are not required but are highly recommended.

Persons can schedule an appointment by calling our office at 956.318.2200, ext. 6270. For a passport application and more information regarding passport requirements and fees, visit [www.travel.state.gov](http://www.travel.state.gov) or [www.co.hidalgo.tx.us](http://www.co.hidalgo.tx.us).

Our passport agents look forward to answering all of your passport inquires and assisting in making your family's passport experience as smooth and pleasant as possible.



# Jury



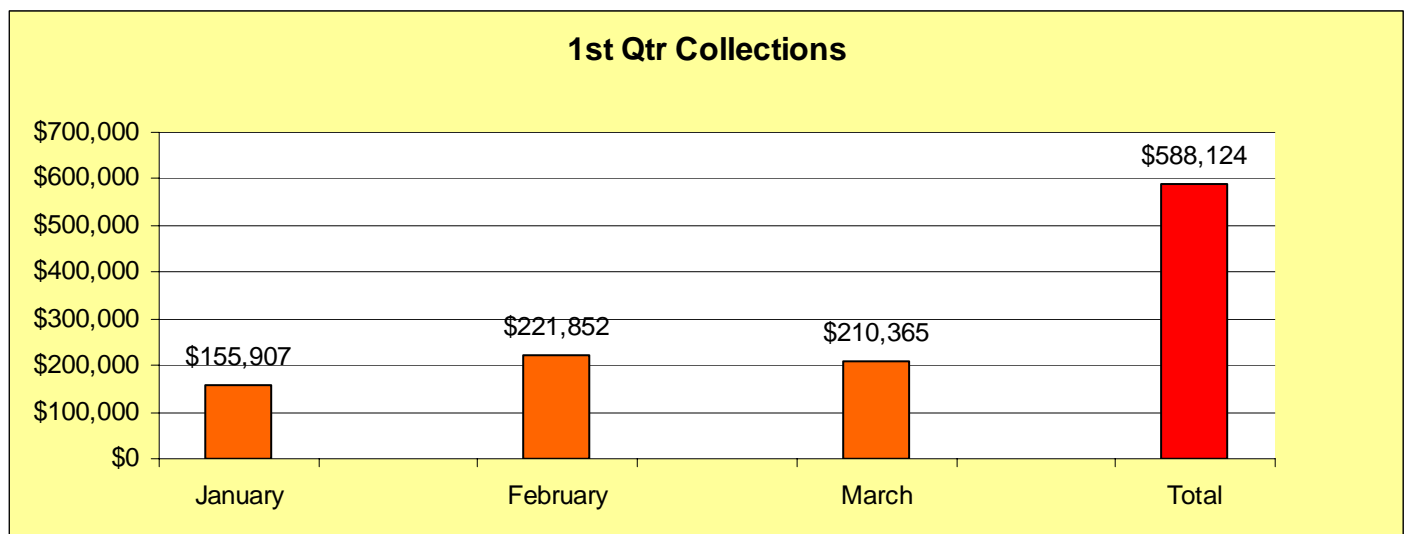
After an extended *Request for Proposal* (RFP) process for the purchase of a new jury software in 2008, the district clerk office is proud to announce the procurement of ACS Juror Management Solutions. The ACS Juror Solutions Group will be responsible for all ACS jury-related activities, including the development, and ongoing support of the juror system and its component modules. This includes **eJuror** which enables Jurors to communicate with the court via internet for a variety of tasks.

The group has been successful in providing products and services to over 800 courts across the US, Canada, England and Wales since the early 1990s. Working in conjunction with the National Center for State Courts, and numerous federal, state and local agencies, the ACS Juror Solutions Group ensures this juror system to be the most effective jury management tool available on the market today. Currently all US District Courts in the State of Texas use the ACS Juror System. Additionally, ACS currently provides Records Management Services to the County of Hidalgo. We look forward to working with the ACS Group as it proposes to provide fully-integrated, powerful data management and time saving capabilities to ensure a positive jury experience for both jurors and court personnel.

# Collections

District Clerk Collections Specialists, Gina Hernandez and Ana De Luna, assist in maximizing the collection of court costs, fines and fees under the direction and supervision of the County Clerk's Office. The Collection Specialists meet with defendants in order to determine if the individual is eligible for an extension and/or a payment agreement in an attempt to collect outstanding balances. In 2008, District Clerk Collection Specialists collected a total of \$1,294,001, and have set a goal of \$2.5 million for 2009. Already in the first quarter District Clerk Collection Specialists have collected \$588, 124.00.

Ms. Hernandez and Ms. De Luna will be attending the Governmental Collectors Association of Texas Annual Conference in Galveston during the latter part of May. The association consists of professionals from across the state of Texas responsible for the collection of funds for the governmental entities for which they are employed. The association is devoted to the education, strategies, techniques and tools for judicial collections.



# Legislative Update



**SB 1685**, relating to the creation of a district court records technology fund, was introduced by Senator Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa in March 2009 during the 81st Legislative Session. Its identical companion bill, **HB 3312**, authored by Representatives Veronica Gonzales, Armando “Mando” Martinez, and Craig Eiland, was also filed in the House.

The bills would amend Chapter 51 of the Texas Government Code to authorize a county commissioners court to adopt as a part of the county’s annual budget a district court records archive fee of not

more than \$5 for the filing of a court suit. The fee would be used for the preservation and restoration services performed by the district clerk in connection with maintaining a district court records archive.

Texas Local Government Code 51.317 currently authorizes district clerks to collect a \$5 records management fee, which has proven to be inadequate funding for the required preservation and restoration of court records. The district court records technology fund would supplement the existing preservation fund to assist in the maintenance, storage, security and digital conversion of records. Additionally, the creation of this technology fund would allow district clerk offices to have exclusive jurisdiction of the funding and deter counties from utilizing the monies for purposes other than record preservation. The fee must be adopted by commissioners court before it can be collected.

We appreciate the support of our Texas Legislators and look forward to working with them to help implement sound legislation that will allow our offices to better fulfill our constitutional duties as judicial record managers in the county.

## Staff Development

An integral part of the district clerk’s office mission is to provide educational opportunities to all employees. During our first quarter, the following training was provided to all or a portion of our staff, as applicable:

- Records Management, Texas State Library & Archives Commission
- Expunctions & Sealed Adoptions, District Clerk Staff
- County & District Clerk Association of Texas Conference
- Safety Committee Meeting, District Clerk Staff
- UT CLE County & District Clerk Legal Education Conference

## Save the Date...

**District Clerk Office  
Open House**

Tuesday, May 26, 2009

4pm—6pm



## Contact Information

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## Office Hours

Monday—Friday

7:30am—5:30pm

We encourage your honest assessment of our services as we continue to evolve and improve through your valuable input. Our team of outstanding and hardworking individuals is ready to assist you as it is our priority to provide exemplary service while preserving and maintaining the records of the Hidalgo County Judicial System. Please contact our office if you have any questions or require additional information.

You can also visit [www.co.hidalgo.tx.us/districtclerk](http://www.co.hidalgo.tx.us/districtclerk)

## Hinojosa Appointed President of South Texas Literacy Coalition



Hidalgo County District Clerk Laura Hinojosa tops a list of officers recently appointed to lead the South Texas Literacy Coalition (STLC) which was established in early 2008 to enhance learning opportunities for all of South Texas by ensuring all children and families have access to strong integrated literacy services and resources.

The coalition brings together a range of partners that includes U.S. Representatives Rubén Hinojosa, Solomon Ortiz, and Henry Cuellar; national organizations like Reading Is Fundamental; community leaders; and education experts from pre-K programs and elementary schools up to the university level. Goals include increasing the number of print materials in children's homes, building family involvement in literacy-related activities, as well as building community awareness and an understanding of literacy in general.

Reading Is Fundamental was instrumental in the founding of the South Texas Literacy Coalition, and provided interim leadership as the coalition formed and came to appoint its own officers.

Prior to the forming of the coalition, Reading Is Fundamental (RIF), the nation's oldest and largest children and families' literacy nonprofit organization, provided more than 100,000 South Texas children with free books at least three times a year. As part of the ongoing efforts to increase South Texas children's access to print materials, the Coalition hopes to expand RIF into all schools in the Rio Grande Valley in the next few years. This year, 38 schools have been added to the RIF program, serving an additional 26,014 children throughout Region One Educational Service Center in South Texas.

All RIF programs combine three essential elements to foster literacy: reading motivation, family and community involvement, and the excitement of children choosing books to keep.

"RIF is strongly committed to the coalition's efforts to give all children in the Rio Grande Valley access to books," said Carol H. Rasco, president and CEO of RIF. "We are grateful for the support of the congressional offices, and are looking forward to working with the newly appointed officers."

Laura Hinojosa continues to be recognized as a leader for her volunteerism through her affiliation with STLC and other community organizations.

