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Laura Hinojosa

Hidalgo County *District Clerk*



“Change is the law of life and those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.”

~ John F. Kennedy

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Legislative Update



In a recent letter to the Texas State Legislature, the Hidalgo County District Clerk Office and other members of the County & District Clerk Association of Texas requested consideration for an interim study on the assessment of civil filing fees on bail bond forfeitures. The request was submitted due to the following:

1. The Attorney General issued Attorney General opinion GA-0486 (November 21, 2006) stating that the \$37.00 filing fee that Local Government Code section 133.154(a) imposed does not apply in bail bond forfeiture matters because no civil suit is filed.
2. In the case of Safety National Corporation (Agent Michael W. Cox v. The State of Texas; 273 SW 3d 730 (2008) the First Court of Appeals ruled that it is proper to assess civil appellate filing fees in appeals from bail bond forfeitures. The court did not rule on civil filing fees at the trial court.
3. Fort Bend, Moore, Potter, Randall and Wichita counties have been sued because the District and/or County Clerk assesses civil filing fees on bail bond forfeiture cases, at the trial court.
4. During the 81st Legislature House Bill 3451 was filed with the intent of clarifying the issue of civil filing fees being assessed at the trial court in bail bond forfeiture cases. This legislation did not pass.
5. Hidalgo County had 593 bail bond forfeitures filed in district courts during 2008 of which 256 cases remain active in our judicial system. This represents \$52,992.00 for the work related to forfeiture of a bail bond. Of the fees assessed approximately \$10,700.00 was forwarded to the state. There are generally more bail bond forfeitures at the misdemeanor level.

Based on the 2008 filing of bail bond forfeitures in the district courts, the resolution of this issue would save Hidalgo County \$105,984.00 over this biennium. This figure plus the fees from misdemeanor bail bond forfeitures could be a significant loss for the county.

New Jury Software



Almost a year has passed since we initiated our transition to our new jury software. ACS, a Juror Solutions Group, has been working collaboratively with our office to implement all the new 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.

Final stages in the developmental transition include solidifying the jury summons form and juror questionnaire, as well as providing training to district clerk jury staff on all matters related to jury and the county treasurer's office in processing jury checks. The district clerk office anticipates going "live" with the new program in March 2010.

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

Website Updates



Uncertified copies can now be purchased from the District Clerk Office via email. To obtain noncertified copies electronically, simply fill out one of our *Copy Request Forms* available at www.co.hidalgo.tx.us/districtclerk and send to: districtclerk@co.hidalgo.tx.us. Upon receipt of payment, the District Clerk Office will process your request. The cost to purchase a document is \$1.00 per page. If a record search is required, an additional \$5.00 fee will apply. In order to conduct a search our office will require the defendant's date of birth or social security number.

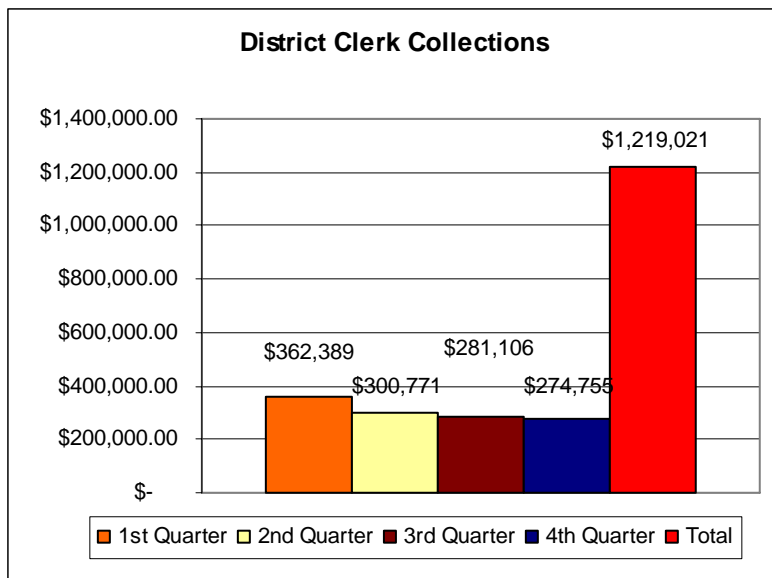
Please note that email copy requests are made available specifically for the public's convenience. Fees still apply as we are unable to email directly from our judicial software. This requires our office to print out the request, scan the document, and email to the recipient. Once our office has fully transitioned to our new judicial software, which should provide the email capacity, we may consider providing electronic copies at no charge.

- Email transactions are payable by credit card only (required copy of credit card and driver's license)
- A convenience fee for credit card purchases will apply depending on the amount of purchase
- Uncertified copies will be emailed to you
- Certified copies can be mailed to you (postage assessed as applicable) or placed in 'will call'
- If choosing 'will call,' indicate on the form the pick up date. Copies at 'will call' must be picked up within 5 days of request.

To obtain certified or non-certified copies by mail, complete the *Copy Request Form* and mail with a self-addressed stamped envelope and proper postage, to: PO Box 87, Edinburg, Texas 78540. Fax copy request can be sent to 956.318.2251.

To more easily maneuver through our automated phone system, check out the District Clerk Staff Directory. Now you can dial the desired phone extension immediately upon calling our main number: 956.318.2200. And if you get a chance, definitely take a look at our most recent press releases and other quarterly reports!

Collections



District Clerk Collection Specialists assist in maximizing the collection of court costs, fines, fees, and outstanding balances under the direction and supervision of the County Clerk's Office. In 2008 they collected a total of \$1,294,001.00.

At the end of fourth quarter 2009, the District Clerk Collection Specialist had collected a total of \$1,219,021.00.

Our office continues to work with the collections department in enhancing collection efforts in the County of Hidalgo with the highest standards of professionalism and courtesy.

"We strive to fulfill our mission in providing the judicial system and the public with efficient and accountable service..."

~Laura Hinojosa

HIDALGO
COUNTY
COURT
HOUSE



Passport Fair

In honor of National Passport Day, the District Clerk Office will be hosting a passport fair on March 27, 2010, on the 1st floor of the Hidalgo County Courthouse from 8am to 12 pm. We encourage the public to schedule an appointment by calling 956.318.2200, ext. 6270. Walk-ins are welcome.

For more information regarding passports and travel requirements please visit:

www.travel.state.gov.

Passport Requirements:

- Passport Application - visit www.co.hidalgo.tx.us or www.travel.state.gov
- Proof of US Citizenship (birth certificate, long form)
- Proof of identity (valid driver's license)
- Two recent color passport photographs, AND
- Fees (visit www.co.hidalgo.tx.us or www.travel.state.gov for current fees)



Appeals

When filing civil and criminal appellate documents at the District Clerk Office, we request that you please visit our information desk inside. One of our Appeal Clerks will be summoned to assist you. We appreciate the public's cooperation in disseminating these instructions to any staff and/or runners conducting business at our office on your behalf. Our Appeals Clerks can also be contacted via email:

Alexandra Gomez, Criminal Appeals - alexandra.gomez@co.hidalgo.tx.us

Aida Villarreal, Civil Appeals - aida.villarreal@co.hidalgo.tx.us

For more appellate information, please visit the official site of the Thirteenth Court of Appeals at: www.13thcoa.courts.state.tx.us.



Safety Committee

In an effort to maximize workplace safety, the district clerk office has structured and implemented an office safety committee. The goal of the safety committee is to eliminate workplace risks by involving district clerk staff and administrative staff in identifying hazards and suggesting preventative measures.

To achieve this goal, the safety committee is structured based on four strategies that include:

- I. Involving employees in achieving a safe workplace
- II. Promptly reviewing and reporting all safety-related incidents, injuries, accidents, and illnesses
- III. Conducting weekly workplace inspections, identifying hazards and recommending methods for eliminating or controlling those hazards
- IV. Annually evaluating the safety committee's workplace safety program and recommend how to improve the program.

Disaster Relief Fund



In partnership with the American Red Cross, the district clerk office is now accepting contributions to assist those affected by the earthquake in Haiti. Your gift to the American Red Cross will support emergency relief and recovery efforts by way of deployed personnel, sending relief supplies and providing financial resources. In support of the relief efforts, district clerk staff has added an additional jean day to its "*Blues for Bucks*" Workplace Fundraising Campaign which allows staff to wear jeans in exchange for a \$5 donation.

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

Palm Valley Animal Center Check Presentation



The Hidalgo County District Clerk Staff presented on December 22nd a check totaling \$2,500 to the Palm Valley Animal Center as part of their *Blues for Bucks* Workplace Fundraising Campaign to benefit local charitable organizations. The Palm Valley Animal Center is a private, non-profit, open-door animal welfare agency serving the needs of animals, pet owners and the community at large and is the only animal shelter serving Hidalgo County.

“Our staff is pleased to be able to give back to the community through our workplace fundraising campaign. Although our staff contributions are small, we recognize

their significant affect on many of the nonprofit organizations that rely solely on the local support of their community,” said Laura Hinojosa, Hidalgo County District Clerk.

The district clerk office kicked off their charitable efforts in 2008 as part of the American Heart Association’s *Go Red for Women* campaign. The program, which allows department 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 two years the district clerk office has collected over \$10,500 which has gone to the American Heart Association, the American Diabetes Association and the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

“The Palm Valley Animal Center greatly appreciates the donations that have been made by the district clerk’s office and their fantastic *Blues for Bucks* program. It is a great program that serves the community so well and we look forward to putting the money to good use for the homeless, companion animals of Hidalgo County,” said Shannon Ponce, Palm Valley Animal Center Director of Community Outreach. “The money will be used to help purchase much needed supplies for the over 125 animals we receive each day, totaling close to 40,000 each year. Thank you for your support and for choosing the Palm Valley Animal Center as this donation cycle’s recipient. The homeless animals and our staff extend a huge thank you!”

For more information on volunteer opportunities or making a contribution to the Palm Valley Animal Center, log on to <http://palmvalleyanimalcenter.org> or contact Shannon Ponce at (956) 686-1141 ext. 26 or development@palmvalleyanimalcenter.org.

