

eFiling Update

by Kevin M. Oeffner
Circuit Court Administrator



My last *LACHES* article entirely dedicated to eFiling was published in May 2010. Much has transpired in the two years since and so it seems timely to update readers on the status of our eFiling program.

In August 2007 eFiling began as a pilot program involving a single judge. For purposes of the pilot program, only type C and N civil cases were included. The program expanded by three judges in 2008, three additional judges in 2009, and the remaining six Civil/Criminal Division judges in 2010. Type A and P civil cases were added to the

program in November 2009. So the entire civil dockets of all 13 civil/criminal judges are now in the eFiling program.

In May 2010, we expanded into the Family Division by adding type DO cases (divorce without children) for two judges. Two more Family Division judges were added in 2011 and one in 2012. In July 2011, we included a subset of one judge's DM (divorce with children) docket involving one Friend of the Court referee. In the Family Division, the DO dockets of five judges and the partial DM docket of one judge now are included in eFiling.

I should also mention that the Probate Court began a pilot eFiling program with one judge in November 2011. You can find more information about the Probate Court eFiling program in the November 2011 and February 2012 editions of *LACHES*, written by Chief Probate Judge Linda Hallmark and Probate Court Administrator Rebecca Schnelz, respectively.

That's where we stand with eFiling judges and dockets at the moment. Several enhancements to the eFiling program were implemented over the past several months, some of which have been mentioned in previous *LACHES* articles. Here is a brief description of these enhancements.

In 2011, our eFiling vendor modified its application to generate an automatic email notification to the filer if a document is not accepted. It used to be that the filer had to check his eFiling queue to be sure that filings were accepted by the system. The automated notification feature removes the filer's burden to have to check on the status of eFiled documents.

It used to be that for cases subject to mandatory eFiling, the initial complaint had to be filed in paper format. In 2011 case initiation documents were allowed to be eFiled, although these documents could still be filed in paper format. Effective April 30, 2012, after nearly one year of both filing methods being accepted, case initiation documents must be eFiled.

When parties are deemed to be indigent and eFiling and other fees are waived by the court, a public account is created in the eFiling application so that these parties may eFile documents at no cost. The Oakland County Clerk's Office

(continued on page 36)

OAKLAND COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

Do you have a concern regarding an active matter before the court?

Joel Serlin, Oakland County Circuit Court Ombudsman, may be able to help.

The purpose of the program is to provide a discreet forum for the informal resolution of issues and matters in which there is no other established or preferred procedure to secure redress.

The Ombudsman is a neutral, vested with the authority to act as an intermediary between attorneys and judicial officers and other personnel.

Hallmarks of the program

Confidentiality | **Neutrality** | **Informality** | **Independence**

**Contact Ombudsman Joel Serlin
at (248) 353-7620**

For additional details about the ombudsman program visit the "Member News" section of the OCBA's website at www.ocba.org, or scan the QR code with your smartphone



(continued from page 30)

creates a user ID and password for the applicable party. To reduce the risk of someone hacking into these public accounts, the system will enable the party to change his or her user ID and password. The court provides training that includes instruction on how to change IDs and passwords, but not everyone affords themselves of the training. The clerk's office will inform indigent parties how to change their IDs and passwords.

In late 2011, the Oakland County Clerk's Office opened an eServices Center to provide attorneys and parties with access to computers and scanners for eFiling documents. The eServices Center is located on the ground floor of the courthouse, just west of the clerk's counter. The center is open during normal business hours. It is staffed by clerk's office personnel who assist persons with locating records, accessing their eFiling accounts, and eFiling documents. Still in its infancy, the center is already averaging more than 60 patrons every day.

As we gain more experience with eFiling and continue to receive feedback from users, we expect more enhancements and changes that will make the system even more user-friendly, accessible, responsive and cost-effective.

Despite our eFiling journey being in its early stages, it's already established benefits to users, the court, the clerk's office and taxpayers. The clerk's office has reported that

customer traffic at the counter is down considerably as a result of eFiling. The numbers of documents scanned into the clerk's document management system and placed in court files was down 24 percent compared to the baseline in 2009. Fewer files have to be transported from the clerk's office to the judges' chambers and back again. The number of cashier transactions is down considerably. And where it once took up to 24 hours for a document to appear on the case management system, it now takes less than five minutes.

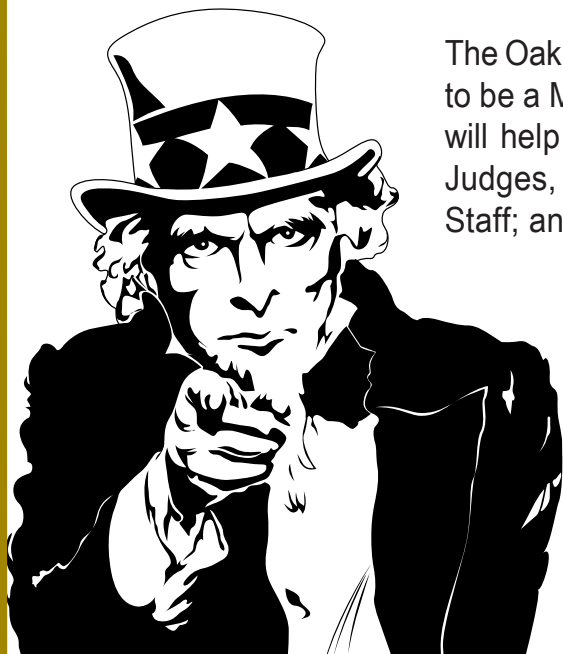
The court has experienced a significant reduction in foot traffic within chambers, reduced use of paper and notable decreases in the volume of incoming and outgoing mail. The court is able to eFile orders to parties and so the corresponding mailing and postage expenses have been reduced. Both the clerk's office and the court have experienced staff time savings allowing these organizations to redirect staff time to other pressing matters.

Most importantly, parties and attorneys tell us that eFiling has saved them time and money. We also receive favorable comments about the convenience and efficiency of eFiling once the user becomes acquainted with the eFiling process.

For more information about eFiling please visit the court's website at <http://www.oakgov.com/circuit/>.

THE OCBA NEEDS YOU...

TO MENTOR NEW LAWYERS



The Oakland County Bar Association needs you to volunteer to be a Mentor to a deserving new lawyer. In your role, you will help them to network; introduce him/her to Lawyers, Judges, Friend of the Court Personnel, Clerks and Court Staff; and invite him or her to OCBA events.

You can help to improve the practice of law!

Be a Mentor!

Please call (before she calls you...)

Jenna Huskinson (248) 334-3400
Mentor Program Coordinator