

Record keeping made easier with e-filing

Streamlining improves public access to records

RON WILKINS

JOURNAL & COURIER

It's not like paperless filing of court cases here is going to single-handedly save the rain forests, but it has certainly reduced the number of hardcopy files and cut down on storage space for old-fashioned case folders.

"E-filing means instead of bringing us paper to start a case or to add to a case, we now get electronic documents," Tippecanoe County Clerk Christa Coffey said when asked to define the term e-filing.

E-filing puts Indiana on track for more transparency, eventually making all public documents in public cases accessible via an internet connection, she said. The experiment of bringing public inspection of public documents to the 21st century is being controlled by the Indiana Supreme Court, which takes counsel from a panel made of public access specialists, legal scholars, defense attorneys, prosecutors and other interested parties, Coffey said.



RON WILKINS/JOURNAL & COURIER

E-filing is making it easier for clerk and courts employees, as well as for public access to records. These two rows of files will soon be digitized, freeing up this space in Tippecanoe Superior 6.

"Right now, the public can see orders online in certain cases, which would be if a judge entered a default judgment," she said. "Orders and certain case types are available online now."

Where as criminal cases still have a paper files in Tippecanoe County, the cases also have an e-file, Coffey said, but only entries, such as dates of hearings and sentencing information, are visible online. That will eventually change, and when it does, people will be able to see every public document in the file, she said.

For example, when a defense attorney files a motion to limit what evidence jurors will hear in a trial, which is usually followed by prosecutor's rebuttal of the defense motion, e-filing eventually will make those documents public as soon as they are filed, she said.

Besides the improved public access to public records, the benefits of e-filing for Tippecanoe County taxpayers is a savings in money.

Two massive repositories of legal files have been shredded because of shifting over to digital files for cases. In turn, this means taxpayers are not paying to rent those storage facilities, E-filing also makes clerk employees' lives a little easier.

Allison Claypool, a court clerk supervisor, said the e-filing streamlines the process of creating legal files for cases and reduces the amount of time it takes to create a file.



RON WILKINS/JOURNAL & COURIER

Tippecanoe County Clerk Christa Coffey stands in front of 17 boxes of papers that will soon be shredded. This is the paperwork from just one week of paper filings, which slowing are becoming obsolete with the electronic filing system. The new system frees up space and improves access to public records.

Reach Journal & Courier reporter Ron Wilkins at 765-420-5231.