

GSCCCA Update

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February 2017

An update on the activities of the Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Cooperative Authority

Board of Directors

Chair:

Jean H. Rogers
Clerk of Superior Court
Crisp County

Vice Chair:

Connie Cheatham
Clerk of Superior Court
McDuffie County

Secretary/Treasurer:

Cindy Mason
Clerk of Superior Court
Columbia County

Greg G. Allen

Clerk of Superior & State
Courts, Forsyth County

Charles Baker

Clerk of Superior & State
Courts, Hall County

Dana Chastain

Clerk of Superior Court
Fannin County

W. Randolph Howard, Sr.

Chairman, Sumter
County Commission

Daniel W. Massey

Clerk of Superior Court
Chatham County

Brenda Weaver

Chief Judge
Superior Courts
Appalachian Judicial Circuit

James C. "Jim" Weidner

Attorney-at-Law
Oliver & Weidner, LLC
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Board elects new officers

At its January meeting, the Authority Board of Directors elected new officers: Jean H. Rogers as chair, Connie Cheatham as vice chair, and Cindy Mason as secretary/treasurer. The election was necessary due to the recent retirement of former chair F. Barry Wilkes, former clerk of Superior Court of Liberty County.

in one capacity or another. While they had their own unique personalities and styles of leadership, I observed some common qualities amongst them all including a tenacious and 'can do' attitude with a vision to the future and a keen awareness on always protecting the interests of the Authority and Superior Court clerks.



Chair
Jean H. Rogers
Crisp Co. Superior Court Clerk



Vice Chair
Connie Cheatham
McDuffie Co. Superior Court Clerk



Secretary/Treasurer
Cindy Mason
Columbia Co. Superior Court Clerk

"I believe that Jean's 23-plus years of experience as a Superior Court clerk, her service on the Authority board, and her multiple leadership roles within the various clerk organizations make her uniquely qualified to not only lead the Authority but to build on the successes of the past," said GSCCCA Executive Director John Earle. "Having worked closely with Jean for the past 13 years, I have no doubt that she will be an outstanding chair for our organization.

"Jean will be the Authority's fourth chair and the first woman to serve in that role. I've had the good fortune of working with all four chairs

"On behalf of the Authority, I welcome the election of all three of our officers, Jean, Connie and Cindy. All three of these women have been leaders within the clerks' community and integral members of our board for many years. I am personally grateful that they are willing to serve in this capacity and give of their time and talents, and know they will continue to play a key role in our growth and success. The Authority staff and I look forward to serving them whenever and however necessary."

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January Board Meeting Review

The Authority Board met on January 18 for its quarterly meeting. Following is a summary of the reports and actions of the meeting.

Swearing in of New Board Member:

Authority Communications Director Mike Smith, who is a notary public, administered the oath of office to new board member Greg G. Allen, Forsyth County Clerk of Superior and State Courts. (See photo below.)



Election of Board Officers:

The following slate of officers was approved by the Board: Jean H. Rogers as chair; Connie Cheatham as vice chair; and Cindy Mason as secretary/treasurer.

General Business:

The minutes of the October 12, 2016 board meeting were approved by the Board.

Greg Morgan, with Mauldin & Jenkins, provided the Accountant's Review and reported that the Authority's overall financial health is good and credited this to the sound accounting principles being practiced by the Authority staff.

Fines & Fees Division:

The amended Fines and Fees Rules and Regulations to include the new Safe Harbor Fund as part of the priority distribution schedules were approved by the Board. Although collections are slightly down, which was anticipated, the Fines & Fees

Division is on pace to collect approximately \$85 million for fiscal year 2017. Compliance rates remain high, and two new Fines & Fees staff members were recently employed.

Training Update:

As of January 13, 2017, 60,000 users had registered for online training since it was first introduced by the Authority. Notary public classes are being added to the 2017 training schedule. To date, nine locations have been scheduled with more to be added. Fines & Fees training will also be added, specifically for Superior Court clerk offices with new clerks.

Filing Project:

Only two of Georgia's 159 counties had not been activated for mandatory plat eFiling and those two counties had special circumstances. As of the board meeting, 489 plats had been filed in 111 counties. Many of those awaited processing. Seventy-nine plats had been rejected for various reasons, ranging from the plat being too large, no space (3-inch square) provided by the filer for recording information, the plat was missing required stamps, and an incorrect county was selected by the filer. It was reported that there were 409 new filers, and that 420 new Participant IDs had been issued. Twenty-five percent of all calls to the Authority's HelpDesk have been regarding plat eFiling.

It was also reported that 101 counties are now participating in UCC eFile.

UCC Project:

The total number of UCCs filed through the first six months of FY 2017 is on pace with FY 2016. The Authority has seen a noticeable increase in sovereign UCC activity in recent weeks based upon communication with clerks' offices.

Notary Division:

The number of active notaries is at record high. As of the board meeting, the Authority had sold 380 notary handbooks to 19 clerks' offices as part of the special bulk sale offering.

Many Georgia corporations benefit from the work provided by the Notary Division in issu-



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Board Meeting Review — Cont. from Page 2

ing apostilles and authentications. Business and financial documents are the most common types of documents presented for apostilles by Georgia corporations. The top three countries of destination for apostilles are Mexico, Russia, and Korea.

Historical Deed Re-Indexing Projects:

There are currently 110 counties participating in the Historical Deed, Lien and Plat Re-Indexing Project. More than 55,000 documents from the fourth quarter of 2016 have been released into production. Additionally, more than 9,000 plats have been released into production. The 2017 Re-Indexing Project for 1991-1990 Historical Deeds is moving ahead as scheduled. To date, 104 docket surveys have been received.

XP Migration Report:

Windows XP has not been supported by Microsoft since April 2014, and third-party vendors have stopped supporting Windows XP as well. This made it necessary for the Authority to replace Windows XP running on GSCCCA-provided computers residing in clerks' offices. The Authority is replacing Windows XP with Windows 7 O/S. To date, Windows XP has been replaced in 60 counties. Forty-six counties still need to be completed. In those counties, the Authority is waiting for the offices to return computers. Six counties will continue using Windows XP for an extended period of time because of software/hardware dependency on Windows XP. The Authority is actively working with remaining counties to finish replacement. Sharon Fort and Richard Dunn were commended for their work with counties in the replacement process.

Subscriber Services:

The Authority has approximately 15,300 total subscribers comprised of 12,100 Regular accounts and 3,200 Premium accounts. Premium accounts continued to grow in FY 2016 at a rate of 14.5% over FY 2015. Staff anticipates sharpening focus on Premium account marketing efforts in 2017 with continued outreach to the business community and a more defined distinction between the Regular and Premium accounts.

New Clerk Training:

The board was updated on the successful week of training held in December for newly elected Superior Court clerks. All aspects of Authority projects and services were covered. Additionally,

two special presentations were made by Authority staff, and many valuable, one-on-one discussions were held between Authority staff and new clerks to assist in the training process and to build relationships.

International Apostille Conference:

Authority Communications Director Mike Smith reported that he had represented US Competent Authorities and the Clerks' Authority at a Special Commission meeting at The Hague, Netherlands in November 2016. As part of the US delegation, Smith was asked to make a presentation on the Notary Public Administrators' *Handbook on Apostilles and Authentications*.

Legislative Update:

Legislation that would impact Superior Court clerks and the Authority is being closely monitored including the Department of Revenue tax lien bill, a plat eFiling bill, and a notary public bill that is a version of HB 381, a bill that did not pass during the 2016 legislative session.

Next Board Meeting:

The next quarterly board meeting will be held on April 11-12, 2017 at the Authority office. ■

Authority staff enjoys holiday spirit



Left to right: Chey Neal, Lawanna Pitts, and Justine Brown.



Board elects new officers — Cont. from Page 1

Jean H. Rogers

Jean Rogers becomes only the fourth chair in the GSCCCA's history. She was first installed to the Authority board in 2002, elected to the position by the Council of Superior Court Clerks. At that time, she was elected secretary/treasurer, and, in 2012, she was elected vice chair of the board.

Rogers has served as clerk of the Superior and Juvenile Courts of Crisp County since 1993. Prior to being elected clerk, she worked as a title abstractor for many years. Active in industry activities, Rogers is a past president of the Council of Superior Court Clerks of Georgia, and served as the local project manager for Georgia's first Data Exchange Project. Between the Council and the Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Association, Rogers has served in most every capacity including on the Strategic Planning and Legislative Committees and as a teacher and mentor for new clerks.

Rogers was the 2007 recipient of the ÉCLAT Award, an honor recognizing Superior Court clerks for their achievements. That same year, she was named 8th District Superior Court Clerk of the Year. Both honors were in recognition of her role in implementing streamlined and integrated criminal justice information. In 2011, Rogers was named Clerk of the Year for the State of Georgia by the Superior Court Clerks' Association of Georgia.

Active in civic and local affairs as well, Rogers served on the state board of directors of the American Heart Association and as president of her local chapter. She is a member of First Baptist Church of Cordele, the Crisp Area Arts Alliance, and the Cordele-Crisp County Chamber of Commerce. Rogers is a life-long resident of Crisp County and holds a BS in economics from Georgia Southern University. She and her husband, Mickey, have three daughters and three grandchildren.

Connie Cheatham

Connie Cheatham was appointed to the Clerks' Authority board in 2009 by then-Governor Sonny Perdue for a three-year term, and was re-appointed in 2012 and again in 2015 by the Council of Superior Court Clerks of Georgia.

She was first elected clerk of Superior Court of McDuffie County in 1988, and is now serving her eighth term in office. Active in industry activities, she is a past president of the Council of Superior Court Clerks of Georgia. She has served on numer-

ous committees of the Superior Court Clerks' Association of Georgia including the Conference Committee, Clerks Reference Manual Committee, and Legislative and Strategic Planning Committees. In 2003, Cheatham received the Stetson F. Bennett Clerk of the Year Award, and, in 2006, was a co-recipient of the inaugural ÉCLAT Award.

Cheatham is active within her community and is a past president of the Thomson Kiwanis Club and a member of the Thomson First United Methodist Church. She is a graduate of the University of Georgia with a bachelor of arts degree in English. Cheatham and her husband, Jack, have two children and two grandchildren.

Cindy Mason

Mason was first appointed to the Clerks' Authority board in 2004, and was elected secretary/treasurer in 2012. This will be her second term in the position.

Mason was first elected clerk of Superior Court of Columbia County in 2000, and is now serving her fifth term in office. She has worked in the Augusta Judicial Circuit in various capacities since 1976. She began in the office of Superior Court clerk of Richmond County where she worked for ten years. Continuing her education, she became certified as a court reporter and worked as a freelance reporter, and owned and operated a court reporting firm. She was the official court reporter for the late Hon. Bernard J. Mulherin, Sr., as well as the Hon. Carl C. Brown, Jr., who is currently the Chief Judge of the Augusta Judicial Circuit. She has a true love of research and hopes to one day write a book based on past courtroom experiences.

Mason is the current vice president of the Council of Superior Court Clerks of Georgia and has served as a board member since 2012. She is an active member of the Superior Court Clerks' Association of Georgia and has served in a variety of roles. She is best known for her active participation on the association's Legislative Committee and work representing the interests of Superior Court clerks at the Capitol. She's an active member of her community as well, and spends some of her free time being an advocate for senior citizens.

Congratulations to Jean, Connie and Cindy! ■



Allen joins Authority board



Forsyth County Clerk of Superior and State Courts **Greg G. Allen** has joined the Authority's Board of Directors. He was appointed to a three-year term by the Council of Superior Court Clerks

of Georgia, and was sworn in on January 18 when the board met for its scheduled, quarterly meeting.

"I'm honored to serve on the Clerks' Authority board," said Allen. "I have great respect and appreciation for what the Authority has done for clerks for the past two decades. The deed and land records of the clerks of Superior Court are essential to property rights, which makes them essential to the wealth and economy of Georgia. I look forward to contributing in whatever way I can to this organization's continued success in serving our citizens."

Allen has served as clerk of Superior and State Courts of Forsyth County since 2009. Prior to being elected clerk, he worked in marketing and sales for almost two decades.

Active in industry activities, Allen was appointed legislative chair for the Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Association in 2011, and took on the position of secretary/treasurer for the group in 2015. He has received many accolades for his work including being named both the 9th Judicial Administrative District Clerk of the Year and the Stetson E. Bennett Superior Court Clerk of the Year in 2012. In 2016, he was a recipient of the ÉCLAT Award, an honor recognizing Superior Court clerks for their achievements. The award was bestowed in admiration and appreciation for Allen's work in shepherding through to its ultimate passage S.B. 135, a monumental piece of legislation that protects the future of Superior Court clerks.

Allen is a life-long resident of Forsyth County. He and his wife, Kim, have two sons, Chase and Knox, and one daughter, Ansley. He and his family are longtime members of Cumming First Methodist Church. Allen has served on the Forsyth County Parks & Recreation Board, and is a member of the Forsyth County Rotary Club.

"On behalf of the Clerks' Authority, I welcome Greg's appointment to our board," said GSCCCA Executive Director John Earle. "Greg is part of a new generation of leaders and his extraordinary work on our behalf at the Capitol came at a critical time for our organization. His leadership has been beneficial to all clerks of Superior Court, as well as the citizens of the state of Georgia. We're very fortunate to have him join our board." ■

Plat eFiling implemented in Georgia

As mandated by HB 1004, plat eFiling has been implemented in the State of Georgia, and all Superior Court clerks' offices must be able to file plats submitted electronically from the Authority's eFiling portal, <https://efile.gscca.org>. Since becoming effective on January 1, 2017, almost 1,000 plats have been accepted through the portal. The legislative mandate also required the Authority to promulgate plat eFiling rules and regulations. The Plat Electronic Recording Rules were adopted by the Authority Board at their October meeting and posted under the eFiling information tab of www.gscca.org/learn.

To help facilitate eFiling, the Authority streamlined the registration and participant ID process for individuals wanting to eFile plats. Through a full cooperative effort between clerks and vendors, Superior Court clerks' offices are ready and able to eFile plats in compliance with the law.



Chastain awarded 2016 ÉCLAT

Congratulations to **Dana Chastain**, clerk of Superior Court of Fannin County, for being presented the 2016 ÉCLAT Award by the Superior Court Clerks' Association of Georgia and the ÉCLAT Trust. The ÉCLAT was created to recognize Superior Court clerks for exceptional commitment, leadership, accomplishment and teamwork. The award was presented to Dana at the COAG Fall

Conference this past November.

For the ÉCLAT Selection Committee, the choice was obvious. In the simple, yet powerful, words of committee member Tina Blankenship,

Superior Court clerk of Webster County:

"Dana is a treasure for the clerks."

Those thoughts were reiterated by the full committee including Authority executive director John Earle who said: "Dana is

a quiet leader who prefers to stay out of the limelight but is as powerful an asset to the clerks as any of the current 159."

In nominating Dana for this year's award, F. Barry Wilkes, retired Superior Court clerk of Liberty County, wrote: "Although she shies away from acclaim and would prefer to not call attention to herself, Dana has helped facilitate some of the greatest legislative achievements of Superior

Court clerks during the past seven years and, without a doubt, has enabled us to ward off many bills that would have negatively impacted us, our counties, and those we serve. Simply put, without her connections, insight, and willingness to work on our behalf, we would not have been as successful as we have been legislatively."

Extolling her leadership within the clerk community, Wilkes went on to write: "Dana's leadership in our association and council and with respect to the GSCCCA has been invaluable, particularly at times when missteps could have enabled others to circumvent the years of success and progress that clerks of Superior Court have had. Even though she did so quietly and very politely, she helped quell controversy and abated divisiveness through diplomacy that would not have existed had it not been for her superb leadership. She stays focused on the issues at hand, understands the issues, and ultimately persuades others to do likewise instead of allowing personalities and egos to cloud the issues."

Having worked in the clerk's office for 28 years, Dana has devoted her career to serving the citizens of Fannin County. She has served as clerk of Superior Court for the last 16 years and was recently elected to a fifth term. Active within the clerk community, she was elected 9th District chairperson for 2007-2009, and, in 2008, was recognized by her peers as the 9th District Clerk of the Year. In 2013, Dana was appointed by Speaker of the House David Ralston to serve on the Authority's Board of Directors. She continues to be a member of the board today and also serves on the Training Council for the Superior Court Clerks' Association of Georgia.

Active in her community, Dana participates in the Youth Apprentice program at Fannin County High School, has served on numerous school councils, and has been involved in the March of Dimes, Relay for Life, Chamber of Commerce, and Optimist Club. She is currently enrolled in Leadership Fannin 2016.

A life-long resident of Fannin County, Dana and her husband, Eric, have one daughter, Morgan.



Authority Executive Director John Earle presents 2016 ÉCLAT Award to Dana Chastain.



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ÉCLAT Award — Cont. from Page 6

Outside the courthouse, Dana enjoys spending time with her family biking, hiking and going to the beach.

Those working with Dana in the Fannin County Superior Court clerk's office sing her praises and describe her as a true public servant: "giving," "always a team player," "compassionate," "considerate," "always looking out for everyone but herself."

When Dana was asked about serving as Superior Court clerk, she responded: "Being a public servant is not just a 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. job for me. I never want to take this position for granted. It is an honor and a pleasure to serve the citizens of Fannin County. I also enjoy working with my fellow clerks and others throughout the state."

Based on comments from other clerks and members of the ÉCLAT Selection Committee, the feelings are mutual. As one member stated: "I personally find Dana to be one of the kindest individuals I've met ... [and] know the clerks will be thrilled that she has been selected to receive this year's award."

To recognize and commend Dana for her contributions to the State of Georgia and for being the 2016 ÉCLAT award recipient, the Georgia House of Representatives recently passed House Resolution 188, which in part states:

"WHEREAS, Dana's significant organizational and leadership talents, her remarkable patience and diplomacy, her keen sense of vision, and her sensitivity to the needs of the citizens of this state have earned her the respect and admiration of her colleagues and associates; and

"WHEREAS, this remarkable citizen has established a glowing reputation of renown throughout Georgia for her humility, intelligence, and resourcefulness; and



Left to right: John Earle, retired Liberty Co. Superior Court Clerk Barry Wilkes, White Co. Superior Court Clerk Dena Adams, Dana Chastain, Forsyth Co. Superior Court Clerk Greg Allen, McDuffie Co. Superior Court Clerk Connie Cheatham, and Crisp Co. Superior Court Clerk Jean Rogers

"WHEREAS, it is abundantly fitting and proper that the outstanding accomplishments of this extraordinary individual be appropriately recognized."

Congratulations, Dana, on this well-deserved honor! ■

Bulk Lien eFiling Available

Now available, bulk lien eFiling is the process of eFiling liens by allowing filers to upload multiple, one-page liens as a single electronic document, streamlining the eFiling process. Interested in learning more? Would your tax commissioner's office like to participate? Invite them to join you for one of the Authority's Bulk Lien eFiling webinars scheduled for February 22 and July 25. These webinars will provide complete information on getting started and how to file. See Page 9 for more information on the Authority's 2017 training schedule.



Authority helps train new clerks



The Authority extends a warm welcome to Georgia's new Superior Court clerks (pictured to the left) who recently took office. Authority staff had the pleasure of meeting these new members of the clerk community at the New Clerk Training held in December on St. Simons Island and playing a role in their training. During the week, the Authority staff led sessions to educate new clerks on the Authority's many projects and services.



To the left, the Authority brought a large contingent of staff to help with training. From left to right: Communication Director & Compliance Officer Mike Smith, Project Manager Rachel Rice, Director of Financial Operations Jamie McCarron, Systems Manager Eric Bolton, IT Director Andy Wightwick, Executive Director John Earle, Authority Consultant Gary Yates, and Development Manager Richard McPhaul. Above, Mike Smith discusses the UCC Project and the Notary Division during an Authority training session.



Authority announces 2017 Training Program

The Authority's 2017 training program offers three convenient formats: classroom, webinar, and online training. See details below.

Classroom Training:

Classes are three hours in length (9am-noon), hosted by a Superior Court clerk, and offered free-of-charge. Training on the **Real Estate Indexing Standards** will be

offered in three different locations. Suitable for new and experienced indexers, this class will include a review of the GSCCCA Standards for indexing real estate, lien and plat records with an emphasis on underlying concepts behind the Standards, common errors, difficult parties and instruments, and the indexing certification test. See dates and locations below.

Webinars:

Webinars are remote training conducted via the internet and phone and allow a clerk to have as many staff members as they wish participate. Dates and a description of each of the classes are listed below.

Bulk Lien eFiling — This one-hour webinar will

provide the necessary steps to getting started with bulk lien eFiling. From participating vendors to how-to-register and file, this class is suitable for clerks and filers alike. Is your tax commissioner's office interested in participating in bulk lien eFiling? Invite them to join you!

UCC Training — This 1.5-hour webinar will provide an overview of

processing UCCs in accordance with Georgia law and procedures. The training will cover UCC forms, grounds for refusing to accept a UCC, UCC eFiling, and administrative procedures.

Indexing Standards: Common Mistakes —

This one-hour webinar will address common mistakes found in index data for real estate instruments. These include: government name errors, the "HUD" problem, typos, numbers, abbreviations, hyphenated names, name variations, and cross-indexes from other counties.

Protective Orders — Designed for both new employees and those who need a refresher, this two-hour webinar will cover how to scan and index protective orders and verify reports.

Fines & Fees — This two-hour webinar will cover many facets of the court fee system including the proper assessment, collection and distribution of state and local surcharges and deductions relative to fines, court costs and bond forfeitures; recent legislative changes; an overview of the Georgia statutes and the GSCCCA Rules and Regulations; and sample breakdowns of civil and criminal fines and fees.

Online Training

The Authority also offers a variety of online training opportunities. Courses are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, making training completely flexible. Courses include:

- ❖ Introduction to GSCCCA Indexing Standards
- ❖ Extended Real Estate Indexing Standards
- ❖ Fines & Fees Training
- ❖ Notary Public Training
- ❖ UCC Training ■

Need more information?

Contact Rachel Rice at 404-227-0724 or rachel.rice@gsccca.org with training questions or to inquire about remote training. Go to www.gsccca.org/training to access and register for all training courses.

2017 Training Schedule

Classroom Training:

Real Estate Indexing Standards:

March 6	Rome
May 10	Statesboro
Sept. 19	Adel

Webinars:

February 22	Bulk Lien eFiling
March 1	UCC Training
March 2	Indexing: Common Mistakes
March 8	Protective Orders
March 16	Fines & Fees
April 18	Indexing: Common Mistakes
May 9	Protective Orders
June 6	UCC Training
June 13	Fines & Fees
July 25	Bulk Lien eFiling



Authority provides training at COAG

The Authority offered a variety of training opportunities at the COAG Fall Conference held this past November in Savannah. In addition to providing a computer lab throughout the conference, the Authority hosted vendor demonstrations of plat eFiling and demonstrations on bulk lien eFiling for tax commissioners, along with providing step-by-step instructions on how to get started. Additionally, the Authority conducted Superior Court clerk interviews during the week for use in promoting clerks on its website.



Above, Authority Executive Director John Earle visits with Meriwether Co. Superior Court Clerk Kye Gibson and Harris Co. Superior Court Clerk Stacy Haralson. Upper right, Authority Project Manager Rachel Rice leads a program on plat eFiling.



During the COAG conference, the Authority conducted clerk interviews for its website. Above, media consultant Jeff Johnson interviews Hall Co. Superior Court Clerk Charles Baker. To the left, clerks view a video from retiring Liberty Co. Superior Court Clerk and former Authority Chair Barry Wilkes. The video included Barry's thoughts on both the history and future of Superior Court clerks and the Authority including their successes and challenges. Barry left office on December 31, 2016.

