

# GSCCCA Update

Vol. 28, No. 1  
February 2024

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

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Clerk of Superior Court  
Forsyth County

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Clerk of Superior Court  
McDuffie County

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**Jody Higdon**  
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**Nancy Thrash**  
Lamar County  
Commissioner

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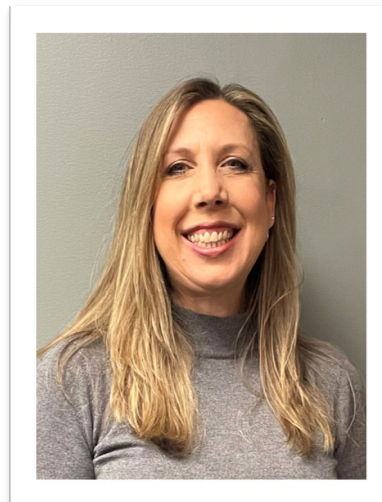
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## Rachel Rice named new GSCCCA Executive Dir.

The new year brought new leadership to the Clerks' Authority team. With the retirement of John Earle at the end of 2023, the Authority Board of Directors promoted Authority Project Director Rachel Rice to the position of executive director effective January 1, 2024. Rachel will serve as the fifth executive director of the Authority since it was established in 1993.



"Rachel has been an integral part of the Clerks' Authority team for nearly two decades," said Authority Chairman Greg G. Allen. "During that time, she has demonstrated exceptional leadership, dedication, and a deep commitment to the Authority's mission of supporting Superior Court clerks. Her vast knowledge of our history and culture, extensive experience in overseeing critical projects, and ongoing collaboration with clerks and other stakeholders make her the ideal person to take over leadership of our organization and allow for a seamless transition of management. The Board is confident that Rachel will continue to champion the Authority's ethos of innovation, prioritize our strong commitment to customer service, and foster a team-building environment — all critical pieces to the Authority's success to date."

Throughout her nearly twenty years on staff, Rice has touched every product and service the Authority offers in some fashion whether through development, management, and/or training. She joined the GSCCCA in 2004 to help support the newly created Fines & Fees Division after the Authority was mandated by the Georgia General Assembly to provide accountability and uniformity to the collection of court fees. She was later given the responsibility of managing the division and, in this role, maintained a compliance rate

of nearly 100% for all courts.

A year after joining the Authority, Rice was able to put her education background to work by developing and coordinating the Authority's training program and is credited with growing this important service with an emphasis on

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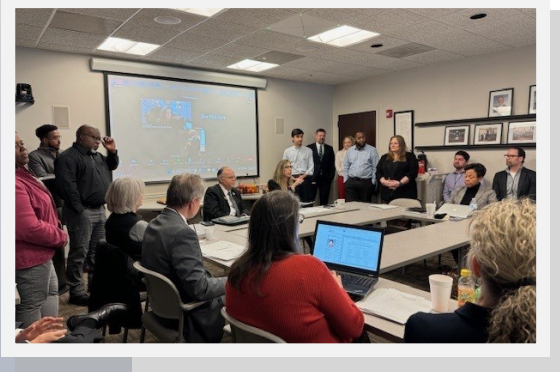
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# January board meeting review

The Authority Board of Directors met on January 10 for its quarterly meeting. Following is a summary of the meeting.

## General Business

The minutes of the October 18, 2023 scheduled board meeting were approved. Adam Fraley,



CPA and partner with Mauldin & Jenkins, reported on the most-recent financial report, ending 11/30/23. He stated that the Authority staff continues to perform at a high level

and meets all accounting industry standards. The Clerks' Authority is on sound financial ground according to the latest financial reports.

## Filing Activity Notification System (FANS)

The Filing Activity Notification System (FANS) was launched on January 15, 2023 and continues to experience steady growth. FANS offers individuals the ability to receive a notification when certain real estate and personal property records are filed with a Superior Court clerk, indexed, and data is transmitted by clerks throughout the state of Georgia. The number of registered users for the system totaled 22,174 as of January 7, 2024. Those users have submitted 45,116 total requests involving names, addresses and document types resulting in 39,942 matches. As of September 1, 2023, each user is required to enter their county of residence when logging into the system. This requirement will simply provide historical data for anyone interested and does not affect search or match results.

## UCC Project

Through the first two quarters of the fiscal year, 3,522 Certified Search requests have been received by the Authority. At the current rate, this projects to approximately 7,000 requests

for FY 2024. UCC Certified Search requests are processed internally by Authority staff involving an exact-name search of the UCC database. Search results are then transmitted to the customer. Through Q2 FY 2024, there have been 125,632 UCCs filed statewide which projects to approximately 251,000 UCCs filed for FY 2024.

## Statewide Network Upgrade Initiative

It was reported during the board meeting that the Authority had completed 90% of all county upgrades. Work for the initiative began in May of 2022 with the stated goal of improving upload and download speeds in all clerks' offices.

## Fines & Fees Division

The Fines & Fees Division is on pace to collect more than \$84 million for FY 2024, which would be the most collected since FY 2019. To date, civil surcharges are higher for FY 2024 than previous years. Reporting compliance for all courts remains high. The Fines & Fees staff monitors potential reporting issues in order to maintain a high compliance rate.

## Training & Outreach

A variety of in-person and virtual training is being offered in 2024 to meet the needs of Superior Court clerks, their staffs, and the public. (See schedule on Page 8.) The Authority's online training platform, eLearn, continues to experience heavy usage by clerks and the public. As of December 31, 2023, approximately 124,417 users had registered to use the site and, of those, 121,712 had accessed the Notary Public course. On the real estate indexing side, 2,705 court personnel had availed themselves of the online deed indexing courses. At present, 72 current clerks and deputy clerks have successfully passed the Indexing Certification exam.

## eFiling Project

Superior Court clerks continue to leverage eFiling initiatives offered by the Authority to better serve the public. As reported at the board meeting, 152 clerks participate in

*Continued on Page 3*



### ***Board meeting review — Cont. from Page 2***

UCC eFiling, with 131 mandating eFiling as the only filing method. Approximately 20,000 UCCs have been eFiled per month thus far in FY 2024. For Real Estate eFiling, all 159 clerks fully participate in accordance with statute by accepting all document types electronically. The online notary public application process has 152 clerks participating, with 50 clerks allowing Mail-in Renewals (MIR). A backlog of pending liens has been greatly reduced by the diligence of Authority staff working to resolve this backlog. Of the 46 counties with pending liens, 45 have been completely or partially resolved.

#### **eFile System Certification Project**

The Authority implemented mandatory eFile System Certification in January 2022, and recently communicated system updates to clerks. Clerks are notified once their eFile system has been certified. As of the board meeting, there were nine systems fully certified, and one system in preliminary testing. Preliminary testing takes the majority of the time for the certification process.

#### **Voluntary Historical Deed Project**

As reported, 92 counties are participating in the Voluntary Historical Deed Re-Indexing Project. More than 5.6 million instruments have been released to production which is an increase of 100,000 instruments from the previous reporting period at the October board meeting. An additional 400,000 instruments are in quarantine for review.

#### **1989-1987 Historical Deed Project**

According to vendor reports as of January 5, 2024, the project includes an estimated 3.6 million total instruments. The budget for the three-year project is \$9 - \$10.8 million. To date, \$6,690,623 in compensation has been paid or is payable to clerks. More than \$850,000 has been paid to vendors.

The 1989 segment is estimated to include 1.2 million instruments. To date, indexing has been completed for 148 counties, which includes 1,036,503 instruments. So far, \$853,267 has been paid to vendors for the 1989 segment.

The 1988 and 1987 segments began July 1, 2023. To date, 82 counties have been completed for 1988, and 81 counties have been com-

pleted for 1987. With a budget of \$4.6 million, the 1988 and 1987 segments are targeted to be completed by June 30, 2025.

#### **Electronic Document Certification Program**

As reported, 87 clerks are participating in the eCert Program, which allows individuals to electronically request certified copies of documents from a clerk's office. Five more clerks' offices are trained and in a testing phase. As of January 5, 2024, participating clerks have received more than 75,000 electronic certified document requests. Authority staff is not aware of any issues related to acceptance of electronic certifications.

#### **Archival Projects**

At present, 158 counties actively participate in the VaultTek Online Archive Program. During Q2 FY 2024, five clerks' offices had equipment upgrades and nine clerks' offices required their data be restored with nearly 5 million files restored back to these offices. This would not have been possible prior to VaultTek's implementation. More than 2.7 million deed images and 260,000 lien images were added to VaultTek during the quarter. As of December 31, 2023, more than 331 TBs of data, containing 1.36 billion files, had been safely backed up for clerks. As an added convenience, users of VaultTek can now access their data via the VaultTek Mobile app.

At present, Virtual Microfilm (VMF) storage includes approximately 314 million images encompassing deed, lien and plat images. Approximately 2.6 million deed images were added during Q2 FY 2024.

#### **Notary & Authentications Division**

The total number of persons commissioned as notaries public for Q2 FY 2024 was 10,081, which is an increase of 1.5% when compared to the same reporting period for FY 2023. Sales of the *Georgia Notary Handbook* remained strong, with 1,071 copies sold for Q2 FY 2024. The number of apostilles issued has risen by 13.7% for FY 2024 when compared to FY 2023 for a total of 22,593 apostilles issued through December 31, 2023.

#### **Next Board Meetings**

Board meetings are scheduled for April 10, July 10, and October 9. ■



*Rice named Executive Dir. — Cont. from Page 1*

convenience and accessibility. In FY 2023, the Authority provided training for nearly 39,000



people through 8 online classes and 176 in-person and remote training sessions.

In addition to her management of the Fines & Fee Division and training program, Rice has been integral to the tremendous growth of Authority's eFile Project which was first launched in 2010. Today, the project enjoys participation by all 159 clerks of Superior Court and allows for millions of documents to be eFiled annually. Serving as a liaison to courts and vendors, Rice's dedication to the eFile Project has supported the Authority's goal of improving the technology within clerks' offices, streamlining the document-filing process, and providing the public access to convenient and effective tools.



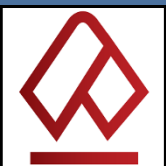
John Earle applauded the board's decision, saying: "Rachel has worked tirelessly over the last 19 years at the Authority in a number of roles including Fines and Fees staff and then manager, Training Coordinator, and most recently Project Director. She is familiar with every facet of our organization and has worked closely with clerks around the state understanding their operations and needs. With the outstanding Authority staff in place and the cooperative nature of the clerks, I am confident that Rachel will do a tremendous job in leading the organization for years to come."

When asked to comment on her promotion to executive director, Rice said: "I'm honored, humbled and grateful that the Board has entrusted me to continue the legacy that John, and David Williams before him, worked so hard to build at the Authority over the last three decades. I'm fortunate to inherit such a talented and dedicated staff, and feel confident that with this incredible team in place, we will continue to do great things for Superior Court clerks, as well as the citizens of Georgia."

Rice has a B.A. in mathematics from Queens University in Charlotte, NC. Prior to moving to Atlanta and joining the Authority in 2004, she taught math, served as the athletic director, and coached several sports teams at a high school in Charlotte. She and her husband, Brandon, have been married since 2007 and have one son, Ethan, who is a freshman in high school.

Rachel has nearly two decades of experience on the Authority's management team, so her promotion to executive director allows for a seamless leadership transition and underscores the Authority's commitment to continuity, stability, and continued excellence. As we embark on this new chapter, we extend heartfelt congratulations to Rachel,

knowing her leadership will continue to inspire and drive our organization forward. Together, we look forward to achieving continued success as we serve the needs of Georgia's Superior Court clerks. ■

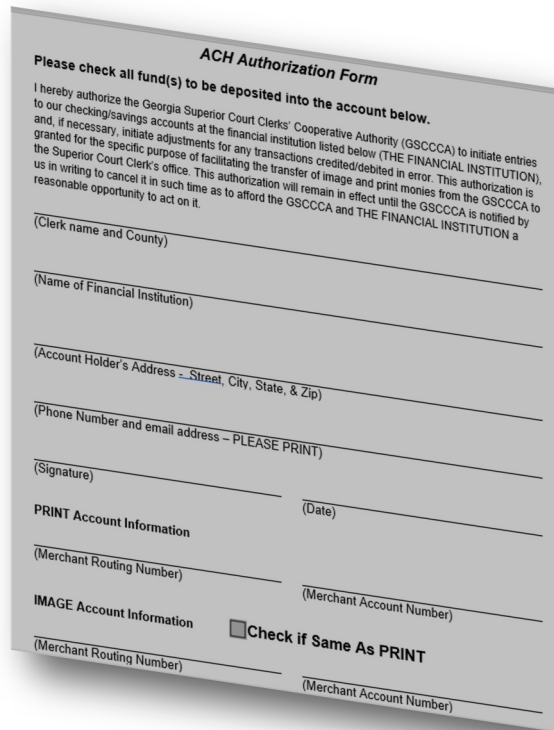


## Receive print/image money securely via ACH

The Authority is excited to now offer Superior Court clerks the option of receiving their counties' print and image money via ACH transfer. In an effort to streamline and enhance this payment process, the Authority initiated this new payment option last August and has received much positive feedback from the many clerks who have elected to take advantage of this safe and efficient payment method.

By opting for the ACH transfer, clerks receive their monthly funds on time along with a report reflecting the details of the payment. Additionally, the transfer is completely secure, reducing the risk of lost payments and all the headaches that come with that. Many clerks have commented that they elected the ACH option both for the ease in which they receive the money and, as importantly, to safeguard their counties' money from lost or stolen mail and eliminate the burden of having to track down the funds if not received.

The Authority is committed to continually enhancing its services and believes the new ACH option benefits clerks by offering them a more secure, efficient, and convenient way to receive their monthly print and image



**ACH Authorization Form**

Please check all fund(s) to be deposited into the account below.

I hereby authorize the Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Cooperative Authority (GSCCCA) to initiate entries to our checking/savings accounts at the financial institution listed below (THE FINANCIAL INSTITUTION), and, if necessary, initiate adjustments for any transactions credited/debited in error. This authorization is granted for the specific purpose of facilitating the transfer of image and print monies from the GSCCCA to the Superior Court Clerk's office. This authorization will remain in effect until the GSCCCA is notified by us in writing to cancel it in such time as to afford the GSCCCA and THE FINANCIAL INSTITUTION a reasonable opportunity to act on it.

(Clerk name and County) \_\_\_\_\_

(Name of Financial Institution) \_\_\_\_\_

(Account Holder's Address - Street, City, State, & Zip) \_\_\_\_\_

(Phone Number and email address - PLEASE PRINT) \_\_\_\_\_

(Signature) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_\_

**PRINT Account Information**

(Merchant Routing Number) \_\_\_\_\_ (Merchant Account Number) \_\_\_\_\_

**IMAGE Account Information**  **Check if Same As PRINT**

(Merchant Routing Number) \_\_\_\_\_ (Merchant Account Number) \_\_\_\_\_

money. Electing this new ACH option is as simple as completing the above form. Contact Jamie McCarron at [jamie.mccarron@gsccca.org](mailto:jamie.mccarron@gsccca.org) to get signed up. ■

## Authority supports Clerks' Winter Training

Superior Court clerks recently held their Winter Training conference in Atlanta and the Clerks' Authority supported the training program by providing on-site audio and visual assistance and facilitating session discussions. Attendance and support for



these programs gives Authority staff valuable face-to-face time with Superior Court clerks allowing for the opportunity to learn more about issues and challenges facing clerks and the opportunity for staff to share information and answer questions about Authority programs and services. This continuous exchange allows the Authority to continue meeting the evolving needs of Superior Court clerks.



## Alan Lee awarded 2023 ÉCLAT

Congratulations to Carroll County Superior Court Clerk Alan J. Lee for being named the 2023 ÉCLAT Award recipient. Alan was honored by his colleagues for his leadership and dedication to advancing technology for the betterment of the clerk's office and, ultimately, to enhance the services provided to the citizens of Georgia.



*Greg Allen, Alan & Terry Lee, Carroll Co. Jury Liaison Catherine Huckeba, and Dana Chastain*

In nominating Alan for the award, a fellow clerk wrote:

“Alan Lee has been on the forefront of technology since he took office, and was one

of the first clerks in the state to allow for electronic filing in every department. I served with him on the Clerks' Authority Board and his innovative ideas inspired many projects. He is not afraid to question or challenge ideas so that we can move forward, but always for the betterment of all clerks. Alan is a thinker as well as a doer. Always thinking outside the box, he puts those thoughts into action and shares his experience and knowledge with our entire clerk body. Alan Lee is a clear choice and so deserving of this prestigious award.”

Greg Allen, chairman of the Clerks' Authority and Superior Court clerk of Forsyth County, also supported Alan's nomination and offered the following praise: “Alan Lee has exhibited exemplary commitment, leadership, accomplishment, and teamwork as a Superior Court clerk and board member of the Clerks' Authority. His calm, professional, selfless and collaborative style encourages all who serve and work with him to do the best job possible. He is roundly liked and respected by all clerks, and has made major impacts to policy and legislation with his quiet influence and demeanor. Alan's positive approach to finding workable solutions to thorny issues has established him as a role model for clerks statewide. I am proud to call him fellow clerk and friend.”

Exemplifying service, Alan is a military veteran and spent 14 years as an investigator in the

Carroll Co. Sheriff's Department prior to being elected clerk. After campaigning on a platform of upgrading the office of the Clerk of Court by implementing new technologies and processes, he took office in 2009 and began leveraging technology and innovation to drive positive change. Through his vision and work, he molded the Carroll Co. clerk's office into an efficient, technologically advanced, and consumer-friendly court office. As important as his efforts were to the citizens of Carroll Co., they extended beyond those borders as Alan supported colleagues across the state and served as an inspiration to others in his quest to continue modernizing Georgia's Superior Court clerk offices.

His forward-thinking approach and meaningful and innovative work within the clerk community have won him the respect and admiration of his colleagues. Alan was elected by his peers in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Districts as their District Chairman in 2018 and then for the next three years following. For four straight years, from 2019-2022, he was also awarded the Stetson F. Bennett Clerk of the Year Award for Districts 4, 5 and 6.

Appointed in 2019, Alan just completed a three-year term on the Clerks' Authority Board. He has also served on several statewide industry committees including the Superior Court Clerks Training Council, Clerks' Council Audit Committee, and, most recently, as chair of the Clerks' Council Finance Committee. Additionally, Alan actively supports clerk-led projects during Georgia's legislative session each year to help ensure legislation is passed that will enhance the office of Superior Court clerk.

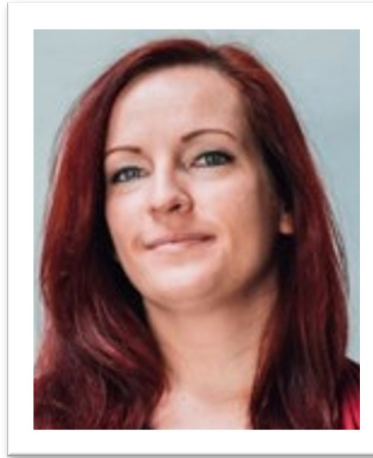
A native of Carroll County, Alan and his wife, Terry, have four adult children and six grandchildren, and together breed Sheepadoodles and Old English Sheepdogs. Alan is an active member of Antioch Baptist Church and a 35-year member of the gospel group Heaven's Echoes which was founded by his father. Outside the courthouse, Alan prioritizes spending time with his family, loves to hunt and fish, and is an avid “do-it-yourselfer” at home and at the office.

Kudos to Alan on this well-deserved honor! ■



## Authority welcomes new team members

The Authority team is growing and welcomed two new members in January: **McKenna Callahan** and **Erika Lindsey**. As the training and education manager, McKenna's primary role is to develop programs and training on subject matters that best meet the needs of Superior Court clerks, their staffs, and the citizens across Georgia. She also serves as the principal contact for all training classes. McKenna brings much enthusiasm for training and planning to the Authority.



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Erika now leads the Fines & Fees team as division manager. Having worked in finance and accounting for the majority of her career, Erika joins the Authority team at an exciting time for the organization. She brings a wealth of

knowledge to lead the Fines & Fees staff. McKenna and Erika look forward to meeting Superior Court clerks and their staffs. Please call on them anytime! ■

## Authority honors Earle upon his retirement

The Authority hosted a celebratory lunch for long-time Executive Director John Earle prior to his retirement on December 31, 2023. Those in attendance included current and former members of the Authority staff, board members Greg Allen, Dana Chastain, Dena Adams, Nancy Thrash and Charles Baker, members of John's family, and other colleagues with whom John had worked during his distinguished career at the Authority. The board honored John by presenting him with a plaque to commemorate his many years of dedicated service to Georgia's Superior Court clerks, and Authority staff presented him with a gift to express their heartfelt appreciation for his steady, positive and collaborative leadership and his genuine friendship.



# Many training topics & multiple formats available

The Authority's 2024 training program is well under way and offers a variety of educational opportunities in three convenient formats: in-person classes, webinars, and online courses. All training is open and free-of-charge to Superior Court clerks, their employees, and vendors.

### In-person classes

In-person, classroom training is being offered on the Real Estate Indexing Standards at multiple locations across the state. Each class is three hours in length and hosted by a Superior Court clerk. Dates and locations are listed in the schedule to the right and a description of the program content follows. To register for classroom training, please go to [www.gsccca.org/training](http://www.gsccca.org/training).

**Real Estate Indexing Standards** – Suitable for both new and experienced indexers, this in-person course provides an in-depth look at the GSCCCA statewide indexing standards including a review of the indexing process from start to finish. The material will cover: why the indexing standards exist and the difference between your local index and the statewide GSCCCA index; extracting and indexing instrument types, party names, property data, cross indexing, and use of the general description field; and a review of hard-to-index instruments including government names, tricky human names, and HUD! Come prepared with questions and comments for the Authority and fellow clerks.

### Webinars

Webinars continue to be a popular format due to their convenience. Program descriptions follow with class dates listed in the schedule above. To register for a webinar, please go to [www.gsccca.org/training](http://www.gsccca.org/training).

## 2024 Training Schedule

### In-person Classroom Training

May 14	Tifton	Real Estate Indexing Standards
August 8	Hamilton	Real Estate Indexing Standards
October 3	Cleveland	Real Estate Indexing Standards

### Webinars

March 5	R.E. Indexing Certification Exam Study Guide
March 21	Get to Know the Authority
April 11	Authority Services How-to Guide
April 30	eFile – Common Questions
May 3	How to Search GSCCCA.org ( <i>New</i> )
June 5	Get to Know the Authority
June 13	R.E. Indexing Certification Exam Study Guide
July 16	Authority Services How-to Guide
July 25	eFile – Common Questions
August 13	How to Search GSCCCA.org ( <i>New</i> )
Sept. 10	Get to Know the Authority
Sept. 13	R.E. Indexing Certification Exam Study Guide
Sept. 18	Authority Services How-to Guide
October 10	How to Search GSCCCA.org ( <i>New</i> )
October 23	eFile – Common Questions

- ❖ **Authority Services How-to Guide** – This course takes an in-depth look at the services the Authority provides and how to maximize use of these services. Want to know how to replace equipment, access MyVault, get access to the Clerk Resource Center, set up new emails? Get the answers to these questions and many more in this one-hour guide for Authority services.
- ❖ **eFile – Common Questions** – With the increase of eFiling, the Authority receives questions regarding UCC and Real Estate eFiling on a regular basis. This one-hour program will review common questions as well as scenarios a clerk's office may face when handling eFilings. This is a great opportunity to learn more about the eFile process and system behavior, and where to go for support!

*Continued on Page 9*





*Many training topics available — Cont. from Page 8*

- ❖ **Get to Know the Authority** – Want to put a face to the name? This 30-minute webinar will introduce the staff of the Authority! We will cover each department in the Authority, the department’s role, how to contact members, the Authority’s history, and much more. Join us and get to know the Authority staff!
- ❖ **How to Search GSCCCA.org (NEW)** – This course provides an overview of how to search the statewide Deed, Lien, Plat, UCC, and Notary indexes on [www.GSCCCA.org](http://www.GSCCCA.org). Included in the training will be sample searches, report this image (and what that means), premium search features, and more! Join us for this 30-minute webinar to get a better understanding of the Authority’s website, GSCCCA.org, and become a savvy searcher!

- ❖ **Real Estate Indexing Certification Exam Study Guide** – This one-hour webinar takes an in-depth look at the Indexing Certification Exam and will familiarize users with the testing system and functionality. Additionally, the program will cover the pre-requisites to taking the exam and offer some tips and tools that can be used to pass the exam.

**Online courses**

In addition to the in-person classes and webinars being offered in 2024, the Authority will continue to provide its popular and widely utilized online training courses via its eLearn website.

Courses include:

- ❖ GSCCCA Indexing Standards
- ❖ GSCCCA Indexing Standards – Extended
- ❖ GSCCCA Indexing Standards – Common Mistakes
- ❖ Introduction to GSCCCA Fines & Fees
- ❖ Notary Online
- ❖ Notary Online – Mail-In Renewal
- ❖ Notary Public Training
- ❖ Notary Public Final Exam
- ❖ UCC Training

Courses are available 24/7 making training completely flexible. To learn more about or register for one of these online training options, please go to <https://eLearn.gsccca.org>.

With questions regarding any of the Authority’s 2024 training opportunities, email [training@gsccca.org](mailto:training@gsccca.org). ■

## Take advantage of R.E. classes

Earlier this month, the Authority held its first Real Estate Indexing Standards class for 2024. The class was taught by Authority team member Will Dunn and hosted by Morgan County Superior Court clerk Jody Higdon. Three more classes will be held on the following dates:

May 14 in Tifton, August 8 in Hamilton, and October 3 in Cleveland. To register for classroom training, please go to [www.gsccca.org/training](http://www.gsccca.org/training).

