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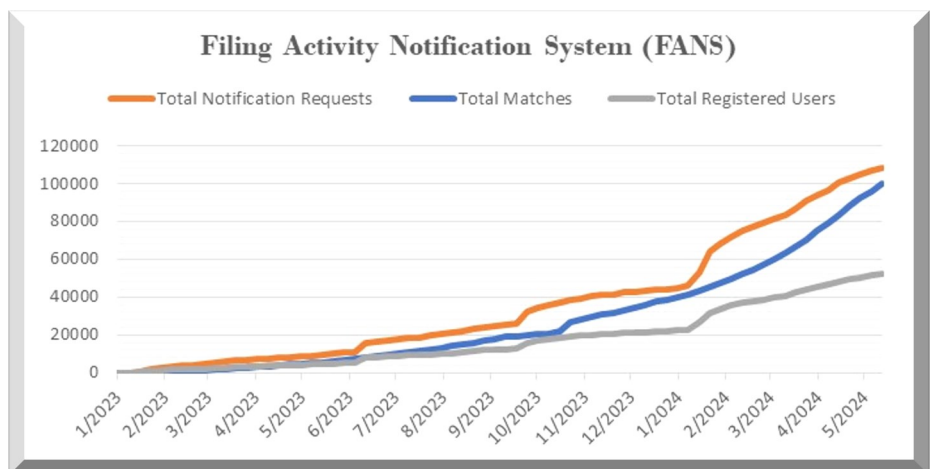
## FANS reaches new heights

A joint venture between clerks of Superior Court and the Clerks' Authority is paying dividends for Georgia's property owners. The Filing Activity Notification System (FANS), introduced in January 2023, has experienced tremendous growth since inception.

FANS is a free, consumer-friendly process that notifies property owners any time filings are made related to their registered property or name(s). The system now has more than 52,000 users, who have created over 108,000 requests resulting in over 100,000 matches. Users are encouraged to investigate further if a match is received.

The Authority developed FANS to give Georgia citizens a powerful tool in the fight against house theft and other potentially fraudulent activity. Even citizens who do not currently own property can benefit from the use of FANS due to its ability to send filing activity notifications for

lien and UCC documents, both of which can affect credit-worthiness. While the system can-



not directly prevent fraud, it can provide prompt notice of filing activity and empower citizens to take swift action when required.

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## April board meeting review

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

### General Business

The minutes of the January 10, 2024 scheduled board meeting were approved. Adam Fraley, CPA and partner with Mauldin & Jenkins, reported on the most-recent financial report, ending 2/29/24. 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.

A motion to adopt the FY 2025 GSCCCA budget as presented was approved by the board.

### 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. As of April 7, 2024, the number of registered users for the system totaled 45,378, which is more than double the users reported at the January board meeting. Those users have submitted 93,660 total requests involving names, addresses and document types, resulting in 75,254 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 three quarters of the fiscal

year, 5,621 Certified Search requests have been received by the Authority. At the current rate, this projects to approximately 7,500 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 Q3 FY 2024, there have been 186,284 UCCs filed statewide which projects to approximately 248,000 UCCs filed for FY 2024.

### Statewide Network Upgrade Initiative

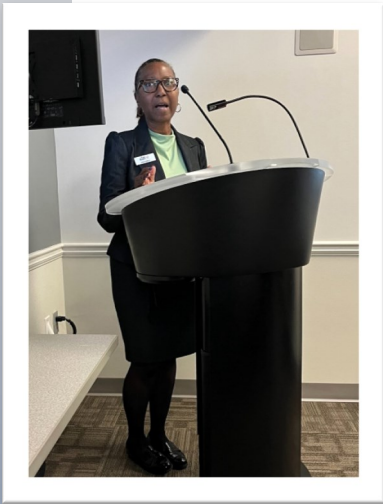
It was reported during the board meeting that the Authority had completed 94% of all county upgrades. Work for the initiative began in May of 2022 with the stated goal of improving upload and download speeds in all clerks' offices.

### Fines & Fees Division

The Fines & Fees Division is on pace to collect more than \$83 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 April 8, 2024, 131,971 users had registered to use the site and, of those, 129,160 had accessed the Notary Public course. On the real estate indexing side, 2,811 court personnel and vendors had availed themselves of the online deed indexing courses. At present, 73 current clerks and deputy clerks have successfully passed the Indexing Certification exam. New training outreach has been scheduled for various dates over the next year which



*Erika Lindsey provides a report on the Fines & Fees Division.*



*Continued on Page 3*

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

will involve GSCCCA subject matter experts sharing their knowledge and insight with the Authority’s Customer Support Representatives (CSRs). These “chats” will assist CSRs as they handle inquiries from customers.

**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 UCC eFiling, with 131 mandating eFiling as the only filing method. Auto-numbering is utilized by 113 clerks. On average, 19,379 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. As of April 4, 2024, there were only 835 pending liens still to be 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. At present, there are nine systems fully certified, and one system in prelimi-

nary testing. Preliminary testing takes the majority of the time for the certification process.

**Voluntary Historical Deed Project**

At present, 94 counties are participating in the Voluntary Historical Deed Re-Indexing Project. As reported at the board meeting, 5,757,891 instruments have been released to production. An additional 538,992 instruments are in quarantine for review.

**1989-1987 Historical Deed Project**

According to vendor reports as of April 4, 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, \$6,729,591 in compensation has been paid or is payable to clerks. More than \$940,000 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, 88 counties have been completed for 1988, and 85 counties have been completed 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, 89 clerks are now participating in the eCert Program, with another four clerks in the testing and training phase. As of April 5, 2024, participating clerks have received 94,499 electronic certified document requests. The eCert Program allows individuals to electronically request certified copies of documents from a particular clerk’s office, thereby avoiding the need to travel to the courthouse. Authority staff is not aware of any issues related to acceptance of electronic certifications.

*Continued on Page 4*



### *FANS — Cont. from Page 1*

“Since launching the service last year, we have received many positive comments from users,” said Authority Communications Director & Compliance Officer Mike Smith. “Our goal is for FANS to provide a tool to help property owners monitor filing activity. We encourage clerks to educate their communities about FANS through their local publications and websites and to alert their county attorneys, their Board of Commissioners, tax assessors and commissioners, and local realtors. We hope as many Georgians as possible can be made aware and take advantage of this new tool in the fight against fraud.”

Citizens can simply register here <https://fans.gsccca.org/> with an email address or telephone number. After submitting a name, the user will receive an email and/or text notification whenever a filing related to that name is filed in the selected records. Users may also register property addresses.

If you would like more information, please contact the Clerks’ Authority at 800.304.5174 or [help.desk@gsccca.org](mailto:help.desk@gsccca.org). ■

### *April board meeting — Cont. from Page 3*

#### Archival Projects

At present, 158 counties actively participate in the VaultTek Online Archive Program. During Q3 FY 2024, three clerks’ offices required their data be restored with nearly 5 million files restored back to these offices. Additionally, during this period, more than 2.2 million deed images and 290,000 lien images were added to VaultTek. As of March 31, 2023, more than 384 TBs of data, containing 1.38 billion files, had been safely backed up for clerks. At present, Virtual Microfilm (VMF) storage includes approximately 317 million images including deed, lien and plat images.

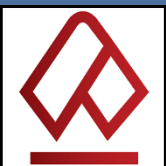
#### Notary & Authentications Division

The total number of persons commissioned as notaries public for Q3 FY 2024 was 12,579, which is a decrease of 10.4% when compared to the same reporting period for FY 2023. Sales of the *Georgia Notary Handbook* remained strong, with 500 copies sold for Q3 FY 2024. The number of apostilles issued for FY 2024 had risen by 4.8% when compared to FY 2023 for a total of 34,6253 apostilles issued through March 31, 2024. ■

## **F&F update: Legislation affects Sheriff’s Retirement Fund**

During the 2024 legislative session, Senate Bill 322 was passed, modifying O.C.G.A. 47-16-61 and affecting the Sheriff’s Retirement Fund. With an effective date of July 1, 2024, the bill increases SRF from \$1.00 to \$5.00 for each civil filing. SB 322 affects Superior Courts and any State or Magistrate Court in which a sheriff serves. This change does not affect the forms that are currently in use. Please continue to use the current forms with the updated calculation for SRF.

If you have any questions or concerns, contact the Authority’s Fines & Fees Division at [finesandfees@gsccca.org](mailto:finesandfees@gsccca.org) or 1-866-847-4058.



## Authority presents at Clerks' Spring Conference

Georgia's Superior Court clerks recently held their Annual Spring Conference at the King & Prince on St. Simons Island. During the week, Authority staff had the opportunity to present to clerks on a wide range of topics including data protection and storage initiatives, current indexing improvement initiatives, ePay and the Image API, the Filing Activity Notification System (FANS), the 1989-1987 Historical Project, the statewide network upgrade, eFile system certification, and eFile and

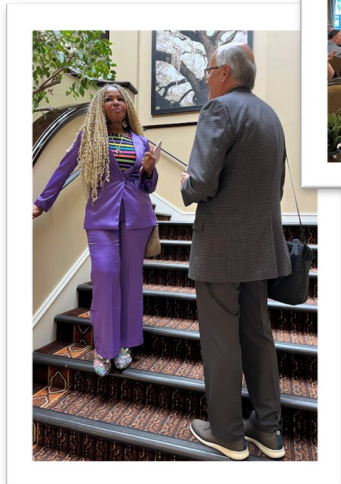
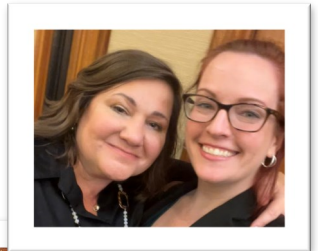
training opportunities. Changes to the Authority's staff were also announced and new team members James Little and McKenna Callahan were introduced. The conference also provided Authority staff ample opportunity to meet informally with clerks to discuss how they could better leverage the services and products offered by the Authority for the benefit of their offices. All Authority presentations during the conference are available at the Clerk Resource Center, under Conference Materials. ■



*Pictured above, long-time Authority consultant Gary Yates presents to clerks on the Authority's current indexing improvement initiative. To the right, Director of Product Management Richard McPhaul provides information on ePay and other ACH opportunities.*



*Shown in the photo to the left, Clerks' Authority "goodie bags" were given to conference attendees. To the right, Meriwether Superior Court Clerk Kye Gibson poses with Authority Training & Education Manager McKenna Callahan.*



*Above, Fannin Superior Court Clerk Dana Chastain addresses the group. To the left, Authority Communications Dir. & Compliance Officer Mike Smith chats with DeKalb Superior Court Clerk Debra DeBerry. And to the far left are pictured Authority Executive Director Rachel Rice and Systems Manager Eric Bolton.*



## Bragg named Clerk of the Year

Congratulations to Wheeler County Superior Court Clerk **Carol W. Bragg** who was named the Stetson F. Bennett Superior Court Clerk of the Year. The award was presented by the Superior Court Clerks' Association of Georgia at their annual Clerk of the Year Banquet which was recently held at the King & Prince on St. Simons Island.

Bragg has served since 2009 as Superior Court clerk of Wheeler County. She was named 8<sup>th</sup> District Clerk of the Year in 2017 and served as the chairperson of the 8<sup>th</sup> Judicial District from 2013-2015. She currently serves as president of the Superior Court Clerks' Association of Georgia.

Also active in her community, she previously served as president of the Wheeler County Chamber of Commerce. She has a business degree from Brewton-Parker College.



The Clerk of the Year award is named for long-time Wayne County Clerk Stetson F. Bennett and honors the dedication and hard work of Georgia's clerks of Superior Court.

In the photo above, Bragg is shown on the right with fellow award finalists Erica L. Woodford, Esq. (Bibb County) and Sheila Studdard (Fayette County). Congratulations to all three finalists! ■

## Authority prioritizes ongoing CSR training

The Authority prioritizes offering top-notch customer service to Superior Court clerks, their staff, and website customers, and regularly receives positive feedback on this critical service. HelpDesk is the Authority's customer support team providing technical support from 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. throughout the work week. In 2023, this team of CSRs handled over 26,000 emails, nearly 24,000 phone calls, and over 1,200 live chats. Their outstanding work is critical to the continued success of the Authority. To ensure continued quality service, the Authority recently began an ongoing training initiative to further educate and update its CSRs on the topics that receive the most questions. Over the remainder of the year, the HelpDesk team will receive updated training on notary and UCC-related issues, indexing, fines and fees, eFile, TPOs (temporary protective orders), and eCertification. This ongoing training results in requests for help being resolved with greater speed and efficiency, with many questions being answered in the initial contact. When you need help, please reach out to the GSCCCA HelpDesk toll free at 800-304-5174, locally at 404-327-9760, or email [help.desk@gsccca.org](mailto:help.desk@gsccca.org). We're here to help!



CSRs pictured: Andy Ejigu, Brittney Starks, Fred Carpenter, Nicolina Montoro & Jeremy Kendrick. Not pictured: Trevin Snow.



## “Unsung Heroine”

### (Ode to Connie)

By F. Barry Wilkes



*She is an unsung heroine;  
A warrior; a mother hen,  
A vestige of a dying breed;  
A loyal friend, in heart and deed.*

*'Though quiet and unassuming,  
She's strong like a lone oak looming  
In a tuft of weeds and thistles  
Engulfed by briars and bristles.*

*She's patient; she's understanding.  
To those thankful, those demanding,  
And those prone to unkind blindness,  
She's a seed of loving kindness.*

*She's the ray of light darkness fears;  
And has been, for many, many years,  
A beacon guiding the lost to shore,  
Providing us a place to moor.*

*She's been our voice of reason  
And, regardless of the season,  
Showed us when to plant, when to reap,  
What to discard, and what to keep.*

*There's no way we can know for sure  
What, for us, she's had to endure  
Or, let alone, the price she's paid  
To save us all the times we strayed.*

*But the depth and breadth of her worth  
Is revealed in our lack of dearth,  
The creations she leaves behind,  
And an ethos she helped define.*

*We will miss her kindheartedness,  
Altruism, and graciousness;  
And the times with her to which we cling—  
In winter, summer, fall, and spring.*

*But, as she fades into her sunset,  
We vow now to never forget  
All the times we needed a friend  
And she was there, with a hand to lend.*

*We'll treasure all the memories  
But wish for her a life of ease,  
Far removed from this madding crowd,  
On new ground waiting to be plowed.*

*As she goes, we bid her adieu  
And pray her hopes and dreams come true.  
May her blessings be superfluous.  
May she be as blessed as she blessed us.*

*Godspeed and happiness, our dear friend.  
Enjoy life until the end.*

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In honor of her upcoming retirement on December 31, 2024, this poem — “Unsung Heroine” (©All rights reserved) — is dedicated to Connie Cheatham, clerk of Superior Court of McDuffie County and vice chairman of the Authority Board of Directors, for 36 years of dedicated and exemplary service to the citizens of her county, the citizens of Georgia, and her fellow clerks of Superior Court. The poem was written on March 30, 2024 by F. Barry Wilkes and presented by Barry on April 24, 2024 at the 39<sup>th</sup> Superior Court Clerk of the Year banquet at the King and Prince on St. Simons Island. Barry is the former long-time clerk of Superior Court of Wilkes County and is a former chairman of the Clerks' Authority.



## Much training available for remainder of 2024

The Authority's 2024 training program has been well received and numerous learning opportunities in different formats continue to be offered. All training is open and free-of-charge to Superior Court clerks, their employees, and vendors.

### In-person classes

In-person, classroom training continues to be offered on the Real Estate Indexing Standards with upcoming classes to be held in Hamilton on August 8 and Cleveland on October 3. Each class is three hours in length and hosted by a Superior Court clerk. 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 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).

- ❖ **Authority Services How-to Guide –**  
This course takes an in-depth look at the

## 2024 Training Schedule

### In-person Classroom Training

August 8	Hamilton	Real Estate Indexing Standards
October 3	Cleveland	Real Estate Indexing Standards

### Webinars

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

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!
- ❖ **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!

*Continued on Page 9*





*Much training available — Cont. from Page 8*

- ❖ **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 continues 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). ■

## Authority attends district meetings

Authority team members Mike Smith and McKenna Callahan (shown in the photo on the left below) recently attended district meetings around the state. These meetings allow the Authority another opportunity to meet informally with Superior Court clerks to learn more about their needs and to answer questions about Authority products and services. The 3<sup>rd</sup> district meeting was hosted by Muscogee Superior Court Clerk Danielle Forté pictured on the right. At the podium in the bottom photo are Superior Court Clerks Radeta G. Smith (Burke) and Hattie Holmes Sullivan (Richmond), who hosted the 10th district meeting.

