

Maricopa Lawyer  
Clerk's Corner  
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### **Clerk's office nationally recognized for records project**

Stories we grew up on, some dating back one hundred years or more, tell of the importance of taking things one step at a time. *The Little Engine That Could*, *The Tortoise and the Hare*, a journey of a thousand miles, *Finding Nemo*. Little improvements done consistently over time can yield big results. The Clerk's back-scanning project for converting paper into digital images is one of those stories.

The Clerk's office is statutorily required to receive, maintain and protect millions of pages of superior court case records across case types, including Family, Criminal, Civil, Juvenile, Probate, Mental Health and Tax. How to accomplish that feat is largely the Clerk's decision under statute, rule, and Code. It became evident more than a decade ago that paper was unsustainable, including the cost to construct new buildings to house that paper.

For new cases filed in 2002 and after, the Clerk's office began scanning and maintaining case documents in digital format, which started the office's Electronic Court Record (ECR). In 2007, the office moved closer to realizing the ultimate goal of creating one of the nation's largest court ECR repositories through electronic filings, or "born digital" records that did not have to be scanned from paper. However, one final piece was necessary to complete a comprehensive digital court record: Back-scanning years of paper case records that were maintained before 2002. The office's formal name for this was the Pre-2002 Adult Case Record Imaging Project and the plan was implemented in 2014, with the goal of back-scanning more than 15.6 million paper pages into the ECR from older adult case types.

Digitizing the paper records provides greater access to all court users, offers greater physical security and reduces the risk of accidental damage, misplacement or loss of records. Additionally, the project supported the Office's ongoing strategic initiative to further implement and utilize the ECR by creating a true, permanent electronic archive of court records and providing records to case parties remotely via electronic access. Parties and practitioners recognize that system as the Clerk's ECR Online (<https://ecr.clerkofcourt.maricopa.gov/login.aspx>).

The back-scanning project's challenges included the hard work of 15 full-time employees, developing a comprehensive cross-training plan, establishing numerous quality assurance audits, preparing final disposition or destruction of the paper documents, and acquiring the equipment needed to complete such a large and long-term project. The project's initial scope and time frame was 24 months, but the project

expanded in 2015 to include adult Mental Health and Probate case records, which extended the time frame another year.

The back-scanning project was completed on schedule in February 2017. As a result, more than 15.6 million more pages of documents are available electronically, bringing the office's ECR to more than 216 million pages. The pre-2002 digitized records can now be accessed from a public access terminal at the Clerk's office locations around the Valley. As envisioned, completing the project created one of the nation's largest electronic court records in a general jurisdiction court. At an awards ceremony in July, the office will proudly receive a national achievement award for the project from the National Association of Counties. This will be the 39<sup>th</sup> award this office has received for its innovative programs over the past 29 years.