



**MELODY LORGE**  
**CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURTS**

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615 NORTH SIXTH STREET, SHEBOYGAN, WISCONSIN 53081 920.459.3068 FAX 920.459.3921

February 24, 2016

To: The Honorable Members of the Sheboygan County Board of Supervisors  
Adam N. Payne, County Administrator

Re: 2015 Annual Report

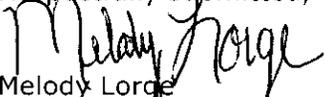
The Clerk of Courts Office was challenged in 2015 to continue to provide timely and efficient services. Despite the fact that overall case load increased in the number of cases filed, it was still challenging because of reduced staff due to several retirements. We are fortunate to have dedicated trained staff who continue to accomplish this.

In 2015, ordinance and forfeiture cases saw an increase of 990 citations for a total case load of 6,579. Felonies decreased by 45 cases, criminal traffic matters decreased by 40 cases; however, misdemeanors increased by 25 cases for a total criminal case load of 2,270 cases in 2015. In total, we received filings of 14,376 cases – a net increase of 668 over 2014. During 2015 the staff disposed of 14,882 cases. We processed 49 appeals and filed 149 liens and transcripts of judgment. We had an increase of four jury trials in 2015, a total of 42, the average number of days per trial decreased taking 63 days to hear them. The total jury trial cost of \$52,129.90 is a decrease of 10% over 2014 and an average cost of \$830 per day, but an increase when compared to \$790 per day last year.

The collections of fines, forfeitures and filing fees increased by \$16,318 of the \$700,000 budgeted; due to our daily collection efforts. Of the total dollars we collected, \$2,042,553.36 was forwarded to the State; \$57,350 was distributed to municipalities within the county. County departments were credited with \$897,687 which is an increase of over \$35,000 in county-retained revenue.

I look forward to meeting the challenges that continue to result from the County's and State's budgets while still fulfilling our responsibilities. As a department, we will continue to look for more ways to improve efficiency and reduce costs as we have done in the past. I also look forward to continuing the partnership with the County Administrator, the County Board of Supervisors and most specifically the Law Committee, in order to provide the resources our department needs to carry out our responsibilities for the courts and the community.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Melody Lorge  
Clerk of Circuit Courts



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### CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURTS OFFICE 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

#### MISSION STATEMENT AND SUMMARY OF RESPONSIBILITIES

“To effectively and efficiently facilitate the administration of justice.”

The Clerk of Circuit Courts is a public official elected every four years, whose basic duties are enumerated in Sections 59.40 and 753.30 of the Wisconsin Statutes; myriad other responsibilities are scattered throughout the Statutes. The Clerk is the administrator of the Clerk of Circuit Courts Office and carries the responsibility of budgeting and administering trial court resources, developing effective policies and procedures, and maintaining competent staff.

Statutes require the Clerk of Circuit Courts Office to maintain a record of all documents filed with the courts, schedule all matters in court, keep a record of all court proceedings and collect the various filing fees, court costs, assessments, surcharges, fines and forfeitures ordered by the court or specified by statute through all means provided for by statute.

The Clerk also provides support personnel for each of the five Circuit Courts, as well as for the Court Commissioner and all outside judges who hear cases in Sheboygan County. The staff is responsible for scheduling court appearances, taking minutes in the courtroom and preparing all notices, judgments of conviction, jail and prison papers, driver's license suspensions, juvenile placement orders and all other documentation and orders as required by statute. The Clerk is also responsible for filing and maintaining the judgment and lien docket, as well as preparing reports to many other agencies of determinations made in the courts.

Jury management is another function of the Clerk of Circuit Courts Office. The Clerk's Office is responsible for qualifying, selecting and notifying potential jurors for service to the five Circuit Courts. Annually, in excess of 5,000 questionnaires are mailed to county residents, and from the responses four different jury pools are created for each of the thirteen four-week terms of service.

#### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED IN 2015

Our goals for 2015 included several technological initiatives, scanning court records and exploring eFiling. Consolidated Court Automation Program (CCAP) provided us with the amount of desktop scanners that were allotted to us by the state. I purchased an additional fourteen scanners for the staff. This has helped immensely with the efficiency of scanning documents, making the scanning process much less time consuming. We began an active scanning program early in the year and all felony, misdemeanor, criminal traffic, ordinance, traffic, juvenile, adoptions, small claims, family, probate and civil cases were scanned. All case types from this point forward are scanned. Adoption records back to 1997 are scanned, as well as the microfilm indexing by all parties' names for adoptions prior to 1940 have been scanned and are available.

We are still working on implementing eFiling. There is a lot of organization that needs to happen with outside agencies as well as staff training in order for this to be implemented. It is scheduled to be implemented before April 2016.

The moving of the Register in Probate office to the first floor is still in the planning process. There are concerns that need to be worked out in order to make this transition happen.

Consolidated Court Automation Program (CCAP) is still in the process of providing us with printers in the courtrooms to begin in-court processing which should be coming soon.

In 2015 there was a new Judge and Clerk elected and I replaced three vacant retiree positions.

A capital outlay was approved for a much needed new sound system in all 5 courtrooms. This will replace the twenty five year old "life exhausted" system.

## **BUDGET**

In 2015, our expenses were the lowest they have been in more than ten years; our revenue had increased. We continue to face the challenge that our greatest expenditures outside personnel expense are for professional services, which are out of our control. The cost in 2015 to provide interpreters, psychologists, court appointed counsel and guardians ad litem in juvenile and family matters was \$282,200. This is an increase of \$1,800 from our 2014 expense.

With several retirements and the ability to hire at lower compensation we were under budget by \$74,000 for personnel related expenses, an increase of \$29,000 compared to 2014.

Thanks to stringent control over all items within our purview, our overall expenditures were more than \$14,000 below our budget of \$2,044,600 which includes our tax levy of \$783,076; the best we have done in a number years. It is the increase of revenue that helped us, an increase of \$29,000 above our budgeted collections revenue of \$700,000. The combination of the two areas resulted in a \$44,000 positive change to the fund balance; an improvement over 2014. We have not seen a positive change in 12 years.

The 2016 budget of \$2,063,600 includes our tax levy of \$813,900; it contains a reduction in the collections revenue, consistent with past years. We have enforced all means of collection and still fall below our targeted amount. With the increased property tax levy awarded us, we feel we are positioned to succeed in meeting our budget this year.

## **ISSUES AND CHALLENGES AHEAD**

Our foremost concern in 2016 is staff allocation and training, since we had three retirements in December 2014 and one retirement at the start of 2016. These long term employees retired with 24, 35 and 36 years of service; and while the positions have been filled there is always a long learning curve. While this is affording us the opportunity to restructure part of the office, the time it takes to train competent personnel has placed a strain on remaining staff.

The number of pro se litigants continues to increase, creating more and more of a demand on the Clerk of Courts office for assistance in procuring forms, answering procedural questions and guiding court users through the process of litigation. Each self-represented litigant requires more staff resources than ever before, yet this is occurring at a time when we continue to operate with less staff.

A new Circuit Court Judge will be appointed in 2016 to replace the current vacant judge position. There has been an announcement of another judge retiring in July of this year. New judges always create many challenges for the department.

Meeting our budget will continue to be a source of concern; however, this year I believe we are positioned to succeed.

### **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2016**

In 2016, we will continue to work with the Consolidated Court Automation Program (CCAP) to implement scanning of new cases as we endeavor to go "paperless", as are many other courts throughout the state. We are looking at transitioning to go paperless by July 2016.

In spring, we will be implementing eFiling, the state's electronic filing program, for small claims, large claim civil and family cases.

Once the County's IT Department finishes the wiring in the court rooms, Consolidated Court Automation Program (CCAP) will be bringing the equipment necessary to implement in-court processing which is a component needed to eventually go paperless.

We are actively working on relocating the Register in Probate office into the first floor Clerk of Courts office. It allows for additional cross training to assist the two-person division along with security concerns.

As the new Clerk of Courts along with my Chief Deputy, we plan on working together to achieve more efficiency, finding ways to improve collections. We will also continue to implement more cross training within the office to help with filling in for vacations and in preparing for future retirements.

With these goals in mind, 2016 will be a challenging but rewarding year.

**2014 - 2015 STATISTICAL REVIEW  
NEW CASES FILED WITH THE CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURTS OFFICE**

<b>CASE TYPE</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Increase</b>	<b>Decrease</b>
Felony	799	754		45
Misdemeanor	1,080	1,105	25	
Ordinance	493	572	79	
Criminal Traffic	451	411		40
Traffic	5,096	6,007	911	
Civil	809	792		17
Small Claims	3,029	2,729		300
Family	607	609	2	
Paternity	238	212		26
Juvenile	381	421	40	
Adoption	33	26		7
<b>CLERK OF COURTS CASELOAD</b>	<b>13,016</b>	<b>13,638</b>	<b>622</b>	
Probate	233	257	24	
Wills Filed	240	238		2
Guardianship	55	66	11	
Mental	164	177	13	
<b>REGISTER IN PROBATE CASELOAD</b>	<b>692</b>	<b>738</b>	<b>46</b>	
<b>TOTAL CASES FILED</b>	<b>13,708</b>	<b>14,376</b>	<b>668</b>	

**JURY TRIAL STATISTICS**

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Increase</b>	<b>Decrease</b>
JURY TRIALS	38	42	4	
JURY TRIAL DAYS	73	63		10
PER DIEM, MEALS, MILEAGE	\$57,581.91	\$52,129.90		\$5,452.01

**FINES, FEES, SURCHARGES & ASSESSMENTS COLLECTED  
COUNTY/CITY/MUNICIPALITIES/STATE DISTRIBUTION**

	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Increase</b>	<b>Decrease</b>
COUNTY OF SHEBOYGAN	\$861,918.79	\$897,686.78	\$35,767.99	
CITY OF SHEBOYGAN	\$52,584.85	\$46,565.90		\$6,018.95
OTHER MUNICIPALITIES	\$11,770.60	\$10,784.55		\$986.05
STATE OF WISCONSIN	\$1,927,320.00	\$2,042,553.36	\$115,233.36	
<b>TOTAL DISTRIBUTED</b>	<b>\$2,853,594.24</b>	<b>\$2,997,590.59</b>	<b>\$143,996.35</b>	

**2014 - 2015 FINANCIAL COMPARISON**

<b>RECEIPTS</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Increase</b>	<b>Decrease</b>
BAIL, FINES, FEES, TRUST, PROBATE	\$6,810,012.84	\$3,780,995.26		\$3,029,017.58
<b>ACCOUNTS RECEIVABLE</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>Increase</b>	<b>Decrease</b>
FINES AND FORFEITURES	\$9,619,034.93	\$9,924,939.69	\$305,904.76	