Conversation With the Clerks: Giles County Circuit Court Clerk

Description

The Honorable Sherry Gautier

Article by Elaine Cook

As a title examiner, I have had the opportunity to visit many different Clerk record rooms, and I have been very impressed with the progress that Giles County has made in making the items needed most available to patrons online.

In recognition of Clerk Appreciation Week (May 5-9, 2025), I decided to talk to our Clerk to see how she has transformed the office to what is available today.

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First a little background: Sherry is in her 25th year serving the citizens and patrons of Giles County. She first worked in the Giles County Treasurerâ??s office, where she was responsible for preparing warrants and garnishments to collect debts owed, and worked at the front counter assisting citizens with DMV transactions. When a position became available as Chief Deputy Clerk, she applied and started working on February 1, 2008.

Sherry held that position until April 2018 when the current Clerk of Court had to step down due to health reasons. She served as Interim Clerk of Court until a Special Election was held that November when she was elected to fulfill the remaining 5-year term of Mr. Fraleyâ??s term. She was then reelected for her second full term in the 2023 election.

She received her Certified Court Manager Certificate in 2022, and Virginia Circuit Clerk Association Master Certification in 2022.

In 2016, the clerkâ??s office began scanning search warrants to make it convenient for attorneys and news reporters. Around 2017, the court began scanning filings in an effort to go paperless. When 2020 came, the foot traffic into the office and records room dropped dramatically due to the pandemic. With her regular customers trying to also avoid coming in, not only did she promote the online SRA access, but additionally, she made note of what documents they most needed available online to better serve them. She tasks her deputy clerks to continue to pull boxes of paper and index them online for availability. In 2021, the Clerk partnered with Digital Memories, a company, to begin back-scanning. Since using this company, they have completed scanning all deed books, will books, chancery order books, and hope to complete criminal order books, highway plat books, and deed of trust books. In 2022, all criminal and civil files became paperless. The Clerk provides a public access terminal in the record room, but also offers OCRA. OCRA is an online subscription that allows access to all civil and criminal files that are paperless. Also, in 2022, the clerk began using hard plastic cards to replace the previously used paper cards for Concealed Handgun Permits. In 2024, the clerk purchased a plat scanner to scan and back-scan oversized plats. Her staff has completed the back scanning of cabinet A, part of cabinet B, with the hopes of having all oversized plats scanned soon. â??None of this would

be possible without the hard work, support, and dedication of my awesome staff.â?•

In addition to applying for funds in their yearly budget for back scanning (which isnâ??t always approved), she has also taken the opportunity to apply for grants available from the Library of Virginia to pay companies like C W Worthington and Digital Memories to come to the office and scan more records.

Of the 865 duties required by Circuit Court Clerks, it is not like you can learn them and then rest because the rules and procedures are in a constant state of change. This Court is located on the main floor of the Giles County Courthouse in Pearisburg, Virginia. Because of its proximity to the West Virginia state line, it is very popular for Courthouse marriages. Since there is no waiting period, no residency requirement, and no blood tests required in Virginia, you can walk in and out of the court with your marriage license in a matter of minutes. They have an officiant on call and it only takes a few minutes for the legal vows! Also, there is no waiting period after having a ceremony and validation of the license.

Of all the duties she performs, the one that was the toughest to learn was Probate. But now that is her favorite because of being able to work face to face with the families and help them understand the process.

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I asked Mrs. Gautier what advice she would give to a newly elected/appointed clerk for success: Communication with the public and employees. Not just talking, but listening to what they have to say and responding with respect and kindness. She has cross-trained her clerks so that the office runs smoothly whenever anyone is out of the office. She is a firm believer that she and her employees are there to serve the public, and she tries to be receptive to their needs.





Sherry E Gautier
Master Circuit Court Clerk
Certified Court Manager
Giles County Circuit Court



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