



SHEBOYGAN COUNTY

Register of Deeds

Ellen R. Schleicher
Register of Deeds

Nila Born
Office Supervisor

February 23, 2010

County Administrator Adam Payne
Honorable Members of the County Board of Supervisors

Greetings:

I am pleased to present the 2009 Register of Deeds Annual Report. In it, you will find a mission statement for the Register of Deeds office that summarizes our goals and responsibilities.

As you review the report, you will see that much was achieved in 2009, but not without great time and effort.

2009 was a year of many challenges and changes, as always when new processes are implemented, the fear of changing procedures is also imminent. The key to overcoming these changes is through education and communication. When the Department of Revenue announced that as of July 1, 2009 all transfer returns had to be filed electronically, no more paper returns would be accepted, our customers were very apprehensive. Inviting them to a informational meeting with representatives from the Department of Revenue helped ease many of their concerns and questions.

Cost containment due to budget cutbacks also posed a challenge this year, we continue to look for ways to reduce costs. We delayed replacing items in the office hoping that they will hold up until revenues return. In November we started accepting deeds electronically, this will help reduce postage costs.

Due to a unexpected retirement we lost a valuable employee. My staff once again stepped up and took on additional duties in order to help retain costs. I wish to thank them for their help, support, enthusiasm and hard work, their dedication to their positions make our accomplishments possible.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen R. Schleicher
Register of Deeds

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ELLEN R. SCHLEICHER - REGISTER OF DEEDS

SUMMARY OF ANNUAL REPORT

2009

Mission Statement

To be fiscally responsible while serving the public in a courteous and friendly manner, following and enforcing the state statutes that dictate our office along with preserving and protecting real estate records, vital records and miscellaneous documents.

Summary of Responsibilities

The Register of Deeds office is the primary source of legal documents, which affect virtually every individual living in Sheboygan County. This includes personal and real estate ownership and encumbrance records in addition to financing instruments that are the basis of individual and business credit ratings. This office executes the final acceptance and filing of new subdivision plats and Certified Survey Maps, administers the Vital Records Registration system, which includes registration of all births, marriages and deaths of county residents, probate instruments, and business documents such as corporate filings.

Other duties include registration, preparation, and issuance of copies of military records, administration of the Wisconsin Rental Weatherization Program, informal probate procedures, and registration of US Treasury Federal Tax IRS Liens. Other statutory responsibilities include the collection of taxes and fees, which are divided between Sheboygan County and the State of Wisconsin.

Required reports are given to the following governmental agencies: US Treasury (Federal IRS Tax Liens), Wisconsin Department of Revenue (transfer fee tax collection and property valuation for tax equalization), the Wisconsin Department of Administration (plat review and the Wisconsin Land Information Program), the Wisconsin Department of Commerce (Rental Weatherization) and the Wisconsin Department of Health and Social Services (Vital Records).

Sheboygan County offices that depend upon us for information and services include the County Veteran's Service Office, Planning, Clerk of Courts, County Treasurer/Real Property and the County Highway Department.

Recorded land records are the basis of the real estate property tax. Translated into monetary terms the land records in the Register of Deeds office represent \$9.2 billion dollars in real estate lying within the borders of Sheboygan County.

Goals and Objectives Achieved in 2009

Total value of real estate recorded and conveyed in Sheboygan County in 2009 was

\$285,083,276 a decrease from 2008 of \$40,617,724.

Our turn around time for real estate documents in 2009 was between three to five days. We processed 2576 transfer returns, 2335 were processed electronically, 241 were manually processed, 383 less than in 2008. As of July 1, 2009, all Real Estate Transfer Returns are submitted electronically, paper copies will not be accepted except under special circumstances. Our office has not processed a paper copy since July 1, 2009.

We continue to update our customers with our “bulletin” type newsletter informing them of any changes in laws, statues, or office procedures. It is distributed via email or the in-office pick up boxes. This has proved to be very helpful in communicating changes.

Last year we started accepting credit/debit payments; this has been a benefit for customers who come in the office without enough funds to pay for services rendered. It is quite a convenience for them to be able to use a card.

Over 60 folks, from title companies, banks and law firms attended our user informational meeting held in May at the UW Sheboygan Campus. The Department of Revenue sent two representatives to demonstrate how to process electronic transfer returns. We had many questions asked and answered, helping folks better understand the new system. We will continue to hold these types of informational meetings whenever major changes happen. As it helps, our office and customers better understand new procedures.

August 1, 2009, Domestic Partnership’s were recognized and added to our vital records processes. We processed and registered 21 partnerships from August to December.

In 2009, we finished the stillbirth project; this was an ongoing project where the state wanted all stillborn births removed from the vital record books. It was a very time consuming project.

Our back indexing project is under way, the staff is attempting to do this between their normal duties, it is proving to be a real challenge to work on most days, especially when we lost one staff member due to a unexpected retirement. Plans to replace this person have been put on hold due to budget constraints.

Our remote access contracts are continuing to provide steady revenue to our office. Now we have nineteen Laredo customers. We continue to encourage customers to utilize this service. In conjunction with the Land Records Modernization Committee, we continue to work on the five-year plan that was drawn up and presented to the County Board in 2005.

We continue to provide public access to child support liens. In order to keep the public informed of any changes that happen in our office we put the current information on our web page.

The ongoing objective for this office is to provide up-to-date practical information for our customers including real estate and uniform commercial code customers, vital record customers, researchers, and genealogists. To accomplish this goal handouts are provided, including pamphlets and flyers on various subjects related to the Register of Deeds office. This timely information is found at the Information Center located at the public counter in our office. Along with the physical information found in our office, we continue to update the Register of Deeds web page for our electronic customers, supplying them with the most current information available.

Budget Status

Revenue collections in 2009 exceeded \$1.5 million dollars. Of the \$1,581,910 of revenue collected in the Register of Deeds office, \$816,897 was appropriated to the State of Wisconsin, and \$765,012 was retained as county revenue. On the county side in 2009, the Register of Deeds office collected \$177,066 in revenues over and above expenses, of which \$132,800 was placed in the Land Records Modernization fund, with the remaining \$44,266 going into Sheboygan County's general fund to offset property taxes. While we generated enough revenue to cover our expenses we were unable for the first time in many years to meet the budget given to us by finance, a \$90,668 shortage to the general fund. This is due to the current real estate market. Even though we did not meet our anticipated budget these figures could have been worse. Lower interest rates offered by banks led many folks to refinance their current mortgages this was beneficial for our office as we exceeded our anticipated budget in the remote/imaging fees area.

The only way our revenues will increase in 2010 is if the real estate market begins to climb again, but I am not holding my breath on that happening yet. The best we can do is to try to contain our costs and work with older equipment repairing rather than replacing.

Issues, Concerns, or Constraints

Had we not benefited from the amount of documents we recorded and filed in 2009 our situation would have put our office in dire straights. In fact, in 2009 we recorded and filed 30,395 documents, 2606 more documents than in 2008. Transfer fee revenues were \$84,386 dollars less than 2008, showing that the real estate economic impact is affecting the housing market in Sheboygan County. If this trend continues, it is hard to predict what our transfer fee revenues will be in 2010. Looking at the last 10 years it seems our peak was 2003, revenues have been declining since then. Unfortunately, we have little choice but to hope that the market will bounce back, but we have no way of predicting when that may occur.

We suspended our back scanning on the vital records program as time became an issue in our office and we never got the free upgraded system installed. We had hoped that this program would become a reality in 2009, but unless we can find a way to get the new program installed and working, it will not be accomplished. In order to be effective in our respective jobs we need to work and support each other, so that all our goals can be

achieved. Technology is growing so fast that it is hard to stay on top of it. Concerns regarding the state and their e-RETR (electronic transfer forms) system were high in the beginning of the year. Again, by educating our staff and the customers early in the process, those changes were easier to accept and the transition caused very few problems.

Goals and Objectives for 2010

We will continue to keep our focus on the turn-around time of real estate documents. The needs of banks and lenders must be met in order to keep the local financial market and economy healthy. This is an ongoing objective for our office.

The indexing of the converted microfilm cards will be our main priority for the next few years as 141,000 images were added to the system and it takes time to get them indexed and verified. So far, of the 141,000 images we have indexed 7940. When this project is completed, it will be a tremendous help to our customers that use our system.

From 1992 through 1996 Certified Survey Maps (CSM) were scanned into the computers but never had legal descriptions applied to them. We completed this project in 2009. We are now working on having all our plats available on the computer

2010 is going to be a year of changes in our office, to better serve our customers we will be upgrading our land records software that we hope will help improve productivity, and the flow of documents through the office. Fraud Alert is another software program we wish to offer our customers, if signed up they will be notified via email or phone that some type of activity is going on with their property and they will need to check on it. The State is getting ready to roll out their new on line system for vital records. This will be a totally new way to process vital records. We anticipate many problems that will need to be worked out before this system will completely replace over the old system.

We are developing a computer index for military discharges that will help us identify and find these records in a timely manner.

We are constantly trying to find the proper technology to help improve our productivity and efficiency, without compromising our customer service. We are anticipating that many of the changes we are implementing this year will help our office achieve these goals. In order to maintain and improve our customer service I will continue to empower the staff by communicating the information they need to meet our customer's questions and concerns.

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