

E-filing Is Option For Court, Too

Jackson County Circuit Court judges and staff are finishing up training on a soon-to-be-launched computer system designed to store all of Oregon's circuit court documents electronically.

"We are going to a paperless system, or, rather, we're going to be providing paper only on demand," said Bob Kleker, court administrator.

Instead of hand-carrying court files from room to room, staff will be able to move documents electronically and share information with plaintiffs, defendants and their attorneys, he said.

Designed by Tyler Technologies out of Texas, the new e-court system, dubbed Odyssey, will allow attorneys to file and serve documents electronically -- and provide the public access to documents online ranging from parking tickets to divorce decrees. The system will get its first local test in early March.

"We've been having intense training of all staff here on site, which has been provided by Tyler," Kleker said.

Judges will also manage their cases from the bench absent their ubiquitous file folders of paperwork. Instead, cases and calendars will be loaded into the new Odyssey data-management system. Judges will be able to pull up indictments, pleadings and other legal documents with the click of a mouse on large computer screens installed at their benches, he said.

"Judges won't have a hard file in front of them," Kleker said.

Jackson County Circuit Court in April joined every other judicial district in Oregon when it began providing an online payment service. "OJD Courts ePay" allows residents and the public to pay most citations, make monthly payments, and pay on many court cases without having to travel to the courthouse, stand in line or try to maneuver through telephone loops. The online service accepts MasterCard and Visa debit and credit cards, while adding a \$3.50 transaction fee.

Odyssey is the next wave of the computerization of Oregon's courts system. The new Oregon Case Information System, or OECS, replaces the old Oregon Judicial Information Network, a subscription-based data system which has kept the state's records on civil and criminal cases for more than 25 years, Kleker said.

Once there were more than a dozen programmers working on the cumbersome and counter-intuitive OJIN system. But that number has now dwindled to two technicians statewide, he said.

"It's really old. They don't even teach it in schools anymore," Kleker said. "OJIN in its day was cutting edge. But things have changed. Odyssey is very intuitive. You can find a case by the person or by the case number. You can view specific documents online, and have them printed out, if you like."

Tyler Technologies has more than 300 employees dedicated to training and maintaining the system, which is being used in six states and many of the country's largest urban courts, he said.

Odyssey rolled out in Oregon's Yamhill, Crook, Jefferson and Linn counties in 2012. Kleker said Jackson County will be the largest circuit court to implement the system in Oregon so far.

But Kleker stressed the start-up process is both rolling and ongoing. Every document that is on OJIN must be transferred to Odyssey. Slowdowns and hiccups are to be anticipated as everyone continues to learn how best

to operate the new system, he said.

"This is a developing process," he said, adding it will take months to fully transition to e-filing.

Staggered Odyssey implementation will begin "going live" on March 7 and 8. Testing of the new system will begin with specific attorneys' offices to see if the e-filing works. Then it will be opened up to all attorneys, he said.

"We will start on the civil end and slowly migrate to the criminal end," Kleker said.

Eventually the courthouse will have five public computer terminals that will provide free access to both OJIN and Oregon eCourt Case Information Systems, Kleker said.

The training has meant tighter-than-usual staffing issues for a court system that has already seen budget cuts, Kleker said.

"Any time you have up to a third of your court staff in training, and if you couple that with reductions, then it's going to have an impact," he said.

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