



**MINNESOTA  
JUDICIAL  
BRANCH**

**First Judicial District**

**Mission:** To provide justice through a system that assures equal access for the fair and timely resolution of cases and controversies.

Hon. Edward Lynch  
Chief Judge  
(651) 438-4352

Gerald J. Winter  
Judicial District  
Administrator  
(651) 438-4330

[jerry.winter@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:jerry.winter@courts.state.mn.us)

<http://www.mncourts.gov/district/1/>

The First Judicial District has 36 judges and more than 250 staff that handle nearly 150,000 cases annually in the counties of Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, Le Sueur, McLeod, Scott and Sibley.

# The First Edition

A Newsletter about the First Judicial District of the State of Minnesota

VOLUME 4—ISSUE 2

APRIL 2013

## Electronic Case Filing Now Available in Eleven District Courts



Attorneys and government agencies can now file their cases electronically in 11 Minnesota district courts. eFiling is a component of the Judicial Branch's eCourtMN initiative to move from paper files to electronic case records.

The 11 courts have served as pilot sites, providing feedback and insights to be used to develop an electronic case filing service for all district and appellate courts. The pilot courts include those located in: Cass, Clay, Cook, Dakota, Faribault, Hennepin, Kandiyohi, Lake, Morrison, Ramsey, and Washington counties. eFiling and eService is currently optional, except for civil and family cases filed in Hennepin and Ramsey counties, where eFiling is mandatory.

Upon completion of the multi-year conversion, all cases will be eFiled, justice system partners and other external constituents will have secure access to electronic records, court processes will be streamlined, and judges and court staff will rely on electronic records for case processing.

"Our pilot courts have helped us learn what we needed to know to be able to develop a service that will work for all of our courts and for our justice partners," said Fourth Judicial District Chief Judge Peter Cahill, co-chair of the eCourtMN Steering Committee.

"Being a judge of a paperless court has been exciting and challenging," said Clay County District Court Judge Lisa Borgen, the other co-chair of the Steering Committee. "Having every court file at my fingertips

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Inside

**1—2 Electronic Case Filing Now Available in Eleven District Courts**

**2—3 A View from the Bench—Civil Litigation Is Not An Oxymoron, It's a Constitutional Right That's Getting Renewed Attention**

**3—4 Calendar Display Monitors Serve as Courthouse Guide**

**5 Court Interpreter Need Constant**

**6 Move to Electronic Records Highlighted in 2012 Judicial Branch Annual Report**

*Electronic Filing (Continued from page 1)*

on my computer on the bench, in my office, or at home has added to my efficiency and my ability to prepare, be current, and to better serve the parties and the public.”

“As we continue to expand electronic records to our judges, the transition from paper to electronic files will be a new and more efficient way of doing the Court’s business,” said Borgen.

Phase Two of the project will focus on preparing remaining courts for transition to electronic case records, beginning with the electronic imaging of paper filings. In addition, staff will develop expertise in assigning appropriate document security, working with electronic case records, and submitting case files electronically to the appellate courts. An eFiling service designed

for self-represented litigants will be piloted later in 2013.

A subsequent effort will focus on developing tools for use by judges in case processing and that support working with the electronic case records. The final phase of the project will involve rolling out eFiling and eService to the remainder of Minnesota’s court beginning in 2014.

## A View From The Bench – Civil Litigation Is Not An Oxymoron, It’s A Constitutional Right That’s Getting Renewed Attention

By Edward Lynch, First Judicial District Chief Judge



The trial involved a contract dispute and lasted 3½ days. The case had been pending over a year. It was clear that the parties were mad at each other and the attorneys could not along with one another. My efforts to facilitate a reasonable settlement based upon the amount at stake in the litigation were frustrated by the expenses the parties had

incurred during the course of the litigation. When the trial was over, one side had incurred attorneys’ fees and costs of almost \$200,000.00 and the other side incurred attorneys’ fees and costs of nearly \$165,000.00.

Civil litigation, including contract disputes and injury claims, generally lacks the drama of criminal cases, receives little media attention and is not followed closely by the public but civil cases make up a significant portion of cases filed in Minnesota Courts, over 170,000 in 2012, and constitute 27% of the work load for judges. If your home is full of mold because your contractor did not follow

building code requirements, you will probably become involved in civil litigation. If a drunk driver runs a red light, broadsides your car and causes disabling injuries to you, civil litigation is in your future. If you operate a business and your customer does not pay for the products or services you provided, civil litigation is your friend.

The volume of criminal cases and the demands of family cases have required courts to devote more time, resources and energy to these proceedings, often at the expense of civil litigation. Court rules for civil litigation provide parties with options to obtain information from each other regarding

*(Continued on page 3)*



*A View from the Bench (Continued from page 2)*

their claims and defenses and to assist in preparing for trial. Complex civil litigation involving multiple parties, significant damages, myriad claims or many witnesses relies upon and benefits from extensive discovery to focus and refine the claims and defenses. Less complicated civil litigation, however, can sometimes become bogged down in the pre-trial process, unnecessarily increasing the time and expense involved in the litigation. The exhaustive use and occasional abuse of these rules can also add to the expense of civil litigation and delay the final disposition. As a result, many civil cases are diverted from the court system by the parties, attorneys or contract provisions into alternate dispute resolution processes such as arbitration or mediation. Over time these alternate dispute resolution options have themselves become more complicated, more time consuming, more expensive and less

attractive for parties engaged in more routine civil disputes.

The Minnesota Supreme Court appointed a Civil Justice Reform Task Force to make recommendations to facilitate more effective and efficient case processing for civil matters and to improve the court's ability to meet its constitutional responsibility to ensure that "every person is entitled to a certain remedy in the laws for all injuries or wrongs which he may receive to his person, property or character, and to obtain justice freely and without purchase, completely and without denial, promptly and without delay, conformable to the laws".

The Task Force included judges, attorneys, court administrators, and representatives from the academic and business communities. The Task Force recommended that an expedited litigation process for certain

less complicated civil cases be considered, a process that requires automatic disclosure of case related information, limits discovery and guaranties a trial within 6 months. Dakota County and St. Louis County have been selected as pilot sites for this expedited process.

The pilot sites will determine whether an expedited process for certain civil litigation will be successful in reducing the time and expense involved in resolving these cases and whether attorneys and litigants will accept a new approach for vindicating the constitutional right to obtain justice freely, completely and promptly.

The Supreme Court is expected to promulgate the ground rules for the pilot program in May, so stay tuned. When approved, the rules will be posted on the Judicial Branch website [www.mncourts.gov](http://www.mncourts.gov).

---

## Calendar Display Monitors Serve as Courthouse Guide

By Brian Jones, Assistant District Administrator

The First Judicial District installed 10 flat screen monitors on lobby walls near entrances in the courthouses located in

Carver, Dakota, Goodhue, McLeod, and Scott counties. The monitors, used in large, multi-judge courthouses, serve as a

guidepost for justice partners, attorneys, litigants, defendants, witnesses, victims, victim advocates, the general public, and the

*(Continued on page 4)*



*Calendar Display Monitors (Cont. from page 3)*

media by directing them to the correct courtroom for the case they are observing or participating in.

The digital signage on the monitors operates similar to airport information monitors. They refresh every 10 seconds to provide the most up-to-date information, which includes daily court hearings listed by party last name. The monitors display information for both confidential and non-confidential cases, but the party name is only listed for non-confidential cases.

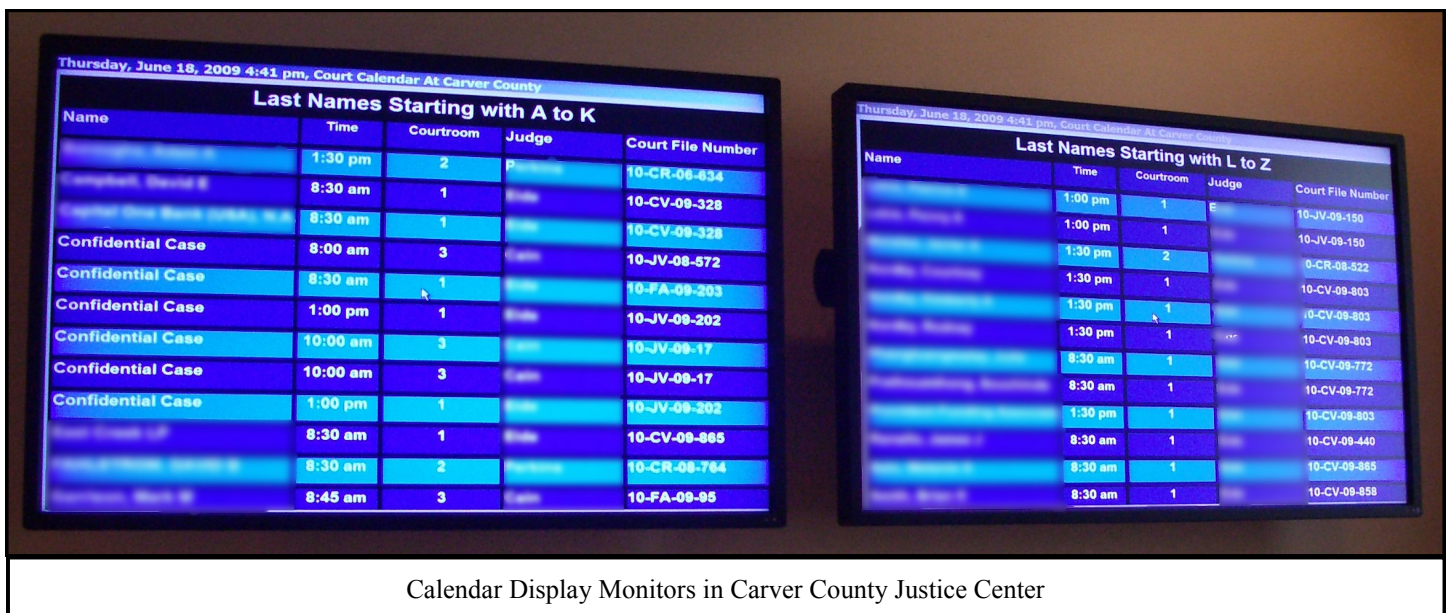
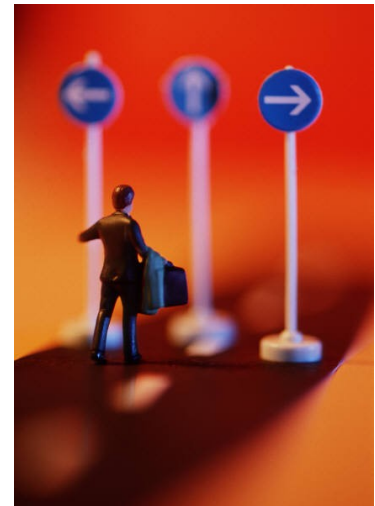
The First Judicial District is determined to become more efficient and cost-effective

through the use of technology. Previously, court staff spent time printing and posting court calendars on courtroom doors, as well as making copies to display at the front counters.

The monitors have reduced the number of questions staff receive from people searching for courtrooms and the judge hearing their case. This has given staff more time to focus on case processing and other work.

Visitors to the courts can access the information without court staff assistance. For example, in the Dakota County Judicial Center - Hastings, the monitors have

replaced a court information desk located near the entrance, which was previously staffed throughout the day.



Calendar Display Monitors in Carver County Justice Center



## Court Interpreter Need Constant

By Polly Ryan, Court Operations Analyst, Court Interpreter Program

Ensuring that litigants or defendants who cannot speak English or are deaf or hard of hearing will be able to participate in their cases has been the goal of the Court Interpreter Program (CIP) since its establishment in 1999 (Minn. Stat. § 480.175). The law requires courts to provide for and pay interpreters when deemed needed for civil and criminal court proceedings. (Minn. Stat. § 480.182; Minn. Stat. §§ 546.42-.43; Minn. Stat. §§ 611.31-.32)

State demographics have changed dramatically over the past 14 years, and as a result the need for courtroom interpreters is now an everyday occurrence. In Fiscal Year 2012 Judicial Branch courts used courtroom interpreters 27,116 times.

The Court Interpreter Program at the State Court Administrator's Office coordinates court interpreter testing, certification and training, as well as assists in developing and implementing interpreter policy and best practices. It also performs various administrative duties, such as maintaining and publishing an online roster of court interpreters who have completed the

Snapshot of Court Interpreter Services Provided in Fiscal Year 2012 July 1, 2011 to June 30, 2012	
<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> Judicial District Fiscal Year 2012</b> <i>Top ten languages interpreted:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spanish</li> <li>Somali</li> <li>Russian</li> <li>Vietnamese</li> <li>American Sign Language</li> <li>Hmong</li> <li>Lao</li> <li>Khmer</li> <li>Arabic</li> <li>Amharic</li> </ul> <p><b>38 different languages were interpreted</b></p> <p><b>3,646 total court events interpreted</b></p> <p><b>96% of all court interpreting events were done in the top ten languages</b></p> <p><b>75% were done in Spanish</b></p>	<p><b>Statewide Fiscal Year 2012</b> <i>Top ten languages interpreted:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spanish</li> <li>Somali</li> <li>Hmong</li> <li>American Sign Language</li> <li>Vietnamese</li> <li>Russian</li> <li>Oromo</li> <li>Arabic</li> <li>Lao</li> <li>Amharic</li> </ul> <p><b>89 different languages were interpreted</b></p> <p><b>27,116 total court events interpreted</b></p> <p><b>93% of all court interpreting events were done in the top ten languages</b></p> <p><b>59% were done in Spanish</b></p>

minimum requirements to become eligible to work in Judicial Branch courts.

District court personnel use the roster to locate and schedule court interpreters for court hearings. Court interpreters are then hired directly and paid by the district court. The roster is also available to public agencies, attorneys, and others requiring interpretation services.

For additional information about the program,

please contact Polly Ryan, Program Coordinator at [polly.ryan@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:polly.ryan@courts.state.mn.us) or 651-215-9468.



## Move to Electronic Records Highlighted in 2012 Judicial Branch Annual Report



The Minnesota Judicial Branch continued its ambitious work re-engineering efforts in 2012, including the expansion of electronic case filing (eFiling) to six additional counties as part of the move to electronic case records. This is just one of the highlights included in the 2012 Judicial Branch Annual Report to the Community. The full report can be found on the Judicial Branch Website at [www.mncourts.gov/publications](http://www.mncourts.gov/publications).

The multi-year eCourtMN initiative calls for all case types to be eFiled, justice system partners and other external constituents to

### *Other highlights of the report include:*

- ***Expanded sharing of case information with justice system partners - By the end of 2012, the Judicial Branch was generating 1.4 million data exchanges per month with government agencies.***
- ***Initiation of work on a new system for timely sharing of court-issued orders for protection with law enforcement agencies.***
- ***Improved collections - An effort to centralize and automate much of the work of collecting overdue fines and fees. The changes resulted in the collection of more than \$20 million in overdue debt in 2012, a 200 percent increase since 2009.***
- ***Improved conservator oversight - A nation-leading effort to improve oversight of conservator accounts, including the creation of a centralized auditing unit to assist courts in their oversight of over \$625 million of assets under court jurisdiction.***

have secure access to electronic records, court processes to be streamlined, and judges and court staff to rely on electronic records.

*Continued expansion of services to self-represented litigants – Assistance is available through walk-in support centers, eMail and phone support services, and a virtual Self-Help Center on the Judicial Branch Website.*

“I am proud of the work our judges and employees did in 2012 to develop more effective ways to fulfill our mission of providing timely justice to the people of Minnesota,” said Chief Justice Lorie S. Gildea.

### The First Edition Editorial Team:

Editor: Brian E. Jones

Formatting Editor: Rita Miest, *RM graphic design*

Comments and story ideas may be submitted to:

[brian.jones@courts.state.mn.us](mailto:brian.jones@courts.state.mn.us)

