

## New court records system

### Yamhill County pioneering new electronic system for rest of the state

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**MCMINNVILLE** — These days, when a Yamhill County judge wonders about the criminal background of someone he or she is sentencing, he doesn't have to hope the attorneys have accessed it for him, or happen to be familiar with it. A few taps on a keyboard will provide a full accounting.

Yamhill County is pioneering a new electronic court records system for the rest of the state. And it puts information instantly at everyone's fingertips — when it works the way it's intended.

However, clerks are finding the system sometimes refuses to do what a judge ordered. That's particularly frustrating when it occurs during a sentencing hearing or some other kind of courtroom proceeding.

But that wasn't exactly unexpected, according to Court Administrator Phil McCollister.

"We are the pilot court, and our responsibility is to shake the tree hard," he said. "When those things fall out, we fix them. The next court, hopefully, will have a lot less issues to deal with."

Next in line are the Central Oregon counties of Cook and Jefferson, scheduled to go online in December.

Like Yamhill, they are rural and relatively lightly populated. Big urban counties will come later.

The state is gradually switching its entire online records system over to the new software, with counties scheduled to transition in ones and twos every few months over the next two years. The existing software, the Oregon Judicial Information Network, is more than 25 years old, and predated widespread Internet use.

Despite some cursing among exasperated staff, during the things-falling-out-of-trees phase, overall, the transition has gone well, McCollister said.

"This is general court operations software," he said. "It wasn't designed specifically for Oregon, so mostly it's how to adapt it to Oregon laws, procedures and policies.

"Some of the problems have been, you click this button and it's supposed to do this. But it doesn't."

McCollister said more than 400 issues had been identified so far, and 372 of them have been resolved.

"I think it's going well," he said. "The software is very good. It works well in several other states. "It's not like they're testing it on us. It's pretty standard. It's just that we have to make it Oregon-specific."

Some aspects are still being introduced.

In November, the county is scheduled to begin having police enter traffic ticket and violation information directly into the system. In the process, an e-payment option will be created.

“People can be online, type in their case numbers and pay online, anywhere they have access to a computer,” McCollister said.

Later, it will allow attorneys to file case documents remotely. However, the Legislature will have to establish a fee structure for that.

“It works now, but we can’t add it until after we get approval from the Legislature for charging the money,” McCollister said. “It’s expected to be \$10, including service.

“It will be much quicker and cheaper, with less additional data entry by the courts. Right now, we have extra work. We want to get some of the advantages to the electronic system, and that’s one of the big ones.”

He said he’s hoping the Legislature will take up the issue in February.

Eventually, the system also will allow attorneys, and other system users, to file and access documents remotely, over the Internet. However, for now, that still requires a trip to the courthouse, where a kiosk has been set up.

“The courthouse computers in our kiosk are public and you can look at documents on those,” McCollister said. But he said, “The interface for other government agencies within Oregon, and legal bar members and those attorneys for record, who need separate access, that’s not ready yet. “The Oregon Judicial Department has to go slow and make sure it’s following the law in making information available. The software can do it, can do it right now. But we have to make sure a branch of government is not giving somebody access to the something they should not have. That’s the biggest delay.”