

# THE COUNTY CLERK OFFICE TEAM SERVES CITIZENS IN MANY WAYS

By James Anderson

County government is often a mystery to the average citizen, even though they may benefit directly or indirectly from the services it provides. In Wisconsin, there are nine constitutional officers as defined by Article VI, Section 4 of the Wisconsin Constitution. The county clerk is one of these officers.

In Douglas County, County Clerk Sue Sandvick has served since 1999, when she was first elected. Prior to her election, she began in the clerk's office in 1985 as secretary to the Douglas County Board of Supervisors. Sandvick's training as a legal secretary helped to prepare her well for what would be a long career in public service.

But what exactly do county clerks do? According to the Wisconsin County Clerks Association, they have certain required responsibilities that include election administration and processing marriage licenses. However, additional roles

and responsibilities may be assigned to the office, and the duties can vary widely from county to county.

County clerk offices serve county boards and committees, prepare agendas, draft meeting minutes for the board or committees, maintain county ordinance books, provide necessary public notice postings and maintain the minutes and records of public meetings. In addition to providing these required services, the Douglas County Clerk's Office serves as a passport acceptance facility, maintains the inventory of county land and processes sales, and is charged with maintaining and updating the county website and social media platforms.

Because of the work this office engages in, accuracy is vital; records must be created and retained in an accurate manner. The U.S. Department of State recently recognized the Douglas County Clerk's Office for diligence and work quality. The staff achieved a perfect score on a recent passport audit review



From left: Kaci Lundgren, web/technology specialist; Cheryl Westman, deputy clerk; Douglas County Clerk Sue Sandvick; Pam Tafelski, office associate.



conducted by the Department of State – the second time the office was recognized for this rating achievement.

One of the greatest changes impacting the Douglas County Clerk's Office has been technology. Several years ago, the Board of Supervisors transitioned from paper board and committee packets to digital packets. County supervisors were assigned iPads to download all documents needed to prepare for a meeting. The County Clerk's Office is responsible for preparing these digital files and maintaining them per public records laws.

Technology changes have also impacted the election process at all stages – election preparations, balloting, counting and publishing results and tracking voter turnout. Sandvick spends the majority of her time working on the elections process, including receiving training necessary for elections and then training town and village clerks and their election inspectors.

The county clerk prepares ballots for each municipality, prepares voting machines and memory devices, publishes election notices and provides other services to support

elections in Douglas County's 22 municipalities. This partnership provides efficiencies and cost savings to the county as well as each of the partnering towns, villages and the City of Superior.

In addition, the Douglas County Clerk's Office contracts with the 21 towns and villages in the county to provide WisVote services. WisVote is the state database that contains voter registration and election-specific information (contests, candidates, absentee voting, etc.). The Douglas County Clerk's Office enters all voter registrations and election data required for each individual municipality.


Elections-related technology has helped produce more accurate election results as well as faster tabulation and announcements of election results. When Sandvick first started in the County Clerk's Office in the 1980s, she recalls a very manual process; precincts were slowly updated and recorded on a board in the lobby of the courthouse for the media and citizens to monitor returns.

Today, each polling station in Douglas County has the same voting equipment that transmits results electronically to the County Clerk's Office. What once took hours can be done in minutes. "In just about 20 minutes after the polls close, the election results are in," Sandvick said, "and we have the uncertified results posted within an hour or so after polls close."

Following the election, results must be certified by the Board of Canvassers. This board, comprising the Douglas County Clerk and one representative each from the Democratic and Republican parties, meets a week following the election. The board double-checks audit tapes from each voting machine with the electronically-transmitted results. After results are verified, the election is certified. This is the final checkpoint in the elections process to ensure accurate results are reported to the State of Wisconsin.

The final step for the clerk's office is to update voter rolls in WisVote. The clerk's

office identifies each person who voted throughout towns and villages and records that they voted in an election. This process doesn't capture the vote, but rather the voter's participation in the election. The office also enters all election-day voter registration forms.

The County Clerk cannot do all of this alone. Sandvick has assembled an exceptional team that is as focused on customer service as they are accuracy. Cheryl Westman is the deputy clerk and focuses on elections and land sales. Kaci Lundgren also works elections and manages the county website and social media platforms. Pam Tafelski is the secretary for the County Board of Supervisors and committees and manages county advertising. In addition, each office member is cross-trained to meet any customer need. "We're here to help our customers find answers," Sandvick said, noting that many people come to the County Clerk's Office first, when they may actually be looking for another office. "We help to direct people to the correct resource, if we are not what they need." 



James Anderson III is the community and economic development educator at UW-Madison Extension Douglas County.



County Clerk Sue Sandvick demonstrates voting technology.

## What Do Voters Need to Know?

- Wisconsin requires voters to be registered; this can be done prior to election day or at the polls, with the appropriate documentation.
- A photo identification document is required to vote in Wisconsin.
- If you do not have a driver's license or acceptable photo identification document, the Department of Motor Vehicles will issue a free identification card that is acceptable for voting.
- If you arrive at your polling place and do not have identification, a provisional ballot will be issued. You have until the Friday following the election to provide proof of identification to your local municipality for your vote to be counted.