

Press Release

Liberty County Clerk of Courts Elected President of State Superior Court Clerks' Association

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Photograph provided on attached diskette, labeled as barry photo2.jpg.

Liberty County Clerk of Superior Court Barry Wilkes was recently elected president of the Superior Court Clerks' Association of Georgia.

Wilkes, who began his fifth term of office as Liberty County's Clerk of the Superior Court on January 1, 2001 was installed as president during the association's annual business meeting, held on St. Simons Island on April 15th. "Although I was honored that the 158 superior court clerks of Georgia selected me to serve as the president of our Association, it was with great trepidation that I consented to the nomination. The demands of my job (as clerk of superior, state, juvenile, and magistrate courts) and my responsibilities at home—to my family, church, and community—are my first priority, but, being deeply committed to the Association, my fellow clerks, the many projects with which we are involved, and all that the Association does for those of us in the trenches, I accepted the nomination," Wilkes said.

He pointed out that the association, as the professional organization of superior court clerks, conducts and coordinates mandatory training, legislative lobbying, and the general business of its membership. The association served as the "backbone" organization for the creation of the Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Cooperative Authority, the entity instituted by Georgia legislators in 1989 to create, implement and operate the nation's first statewide, electronic Uniform Commercial Code and real estate and personal property systems. Recently, the association has collaborated with the Council of Superior Court Clerks of Georgia, the official state agency for superior court clerks, the Superior Court Clerks' Cooperative Authority, state lawmakers, the State Bar of Georgia, state realtors' associations, and various state and federal agency to create and implement electronic, computer-based systems for collecting and disseminating civil and criminal and family violence (protective order) registry data.

"Our latest project involves a partnership with the Georgia Department of Revenue for the purpose of generating and collecting real estate transfer tax information electronically. Because the state is facing shortfalls in revenue, (the Department of) Revenue came to us and asked us to help them find ways to reduce costs for printing paper real estate transfer tax (PT-61) forms that, by law, must be completed by persons conveying property. The forms provide a record of transfers of property and transfer taxes owed as a consequence of conveyances. The paper system was a waste of taxpayers' money and caused more problems than they were worth. Carbon copies produced for the benefit of the tax assessor's, tax commissioners', and the Department (of Revenue) were often illegible. Plus, each local and state department had to re-key data derived from the forms for their office's usage, which was a needless replication of work. (Clerks of superior court) proposed establishment of an Internet-based system that

would enable parties conveying property to generate the actual PT-61 form from their home computer or from a computer situated in the clerk's office. Once completed online, the data from the form would be sent to a repository at the Clerks' Authority and would be distributed to all state and local taxing agencies in an electronic format, thus cutting down on the workload of all departments that are involved in collecting this valuable tax reporting data. It was a simple solution to a complex problem, one that we felt was sorely needed to enhance the data collection process. Best of all, it would not cost local or state taxpayers anything," Wilkes explained.

"This is just one of the many projects with which the Association is involved. We are also working with other judicial agencies to formulate strategies for collecting criminal justice information through computer-based applications. It is critical to law enforcement and homeland security that we revamp local law enforcement and court information systems so that criminal data is available instantaneously to those who rely upon the information to do their jobs. There have been too many cases in which heinous crimes could have been prevented had law enforcement, probation, paroles, and judges had more information about offenders available to them. The fragmented reporting of criminal data allows too many criminals to slip through the cracks, and we have to find ways to keep this from happening," he said.

Last month, the local court clerk was invited by the Council of Superior Court Judges of Georgia to participate in a three-day court information sharing collaborative conference in Augusta. "Our Association pledged to work with judges, district attorneys, sheriffs, municipal law enforcement agencies, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, the Georgia Crime Information Center, and other state and local agencies to work toward development of a seamless statewide criminal justice information system. The (Georgia Superior Court) Clerks' Cooperative Authority was identified as a principal agency that must be involved in planning and implementation of core components of such a system. As president (of the clerks' association), I am going to dedicate our energies and resources to this project," Wilkes said.

Wilkes served as president of the County Officers' Association of Georgia which membership consists of the sheriffs, probate judges, clerks of superior court, and tax commissioners of the 159 counties of Georgia. He served as president of the Council of Superior Court Clerks of Georgia for five years (1990-1995) and was inaugural executive director of the Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Cooperative Authority. He was elected to the Board of Directors of the Authority in November 2000 by the Council of Superior Court Clerks of Georgia and took office on January 1, 2001. He was elected vice chairperson of the Authority in January, 2001.

Wilkes was the recipient of *County Officer of the Year of Georgia* award by the County Officers' Association of Georgia in November, 1999. The prestigious award is presented annually by the association to one of its 636 members, representing the 159 counties of Georgia, for "his or her outstanding contributions to the association, the people they serve at home, and the citizens of Georgia."

In 1993, he was the recipient of the prestigious *Superior Court Clerk of the Year Award* for the State of Georgia. Presented by the Superior Court Clerks' Association of Georgia, the award may be bestowed upon a clerk of superior court only once in his or her lifetime.

Wilkes served on the Board of Directors of the National Association for Court Management (NACM) from 1995-1997. He is chairman of the Liberty County Records Advisory Board which operates the county's off-site, centralized governmental records repository, and president of the Liberty County Information Technology Board, which is responsible for establishment, maintenance, and regulation of the local county-wide governmental wide-area-network.

He is president of the Mary Lou Fraser Foundation for Families, a non-profit organization dedicated to assisting families; is a charter member and past-president (1998-1999) of the Liberty County-Armed Services YMCA, in Hinesville, and is currently an active member of the organization's board of directors; is a member and officer of numerous other civic and social organizations; and is an elder and clerk of the Session of Flemington Presbyterian Church in Flemington, Georgia, where he also serves as editor of the monthly newsletter and as president of the Men of Church. He is a published poet and author.

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