

# 2013 Annual Report

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W E S T C H E S T E R   C O U N T Y   C L E R K



Timothy C. Idoni  
Westchester County Clerk



**Timothy C. Idoni**  
*Westchester County Clerk*

January, 2014

Dear Friends,

I am proud to invite you to read our 2013 Annual Report which highlights our recent achievements. The Office of the Westchester County Clerk continues to build upon what we have already accomplished to deliver better government services at a lower cost to the taxpayer. And as Westchester County emerges from the recent recession stronger than ever before, our staff stands ready to deliver the same level of service in a more active economic atmosphere.

The Office of the Westchester County Clerk now receives more revenue than it spends because fiscal discipline has been a hallmark of my administration. Operating expenses continue to drop, staffing remains lean, and drastic cuts to overtime and hourly staffing have been maintained.

Through the use of technology, our office has been able to re-imagine the way customers do business with us. And with the support of our partners in government at various levels, we have been proud to lead the way in New York State in implementing electronic initiatives. In 2013, we were proud to participate as the only pilot county authorized to accept electronic filing of matrimonial actions.

While Westchester County continues to grow its significant and diverse commercial base, our office continues to provide business professionals with the resources and level of service to help businesses prosper such as the ability to view public records online, submit land records electronically, and file certain court papers twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week.

The NY SAFE Act, signed into law in mid-January, not only tightened gun laws throughout New York State, but also provided a process for pistol licensees to shield their names and addresses from public disclosure. In 2013, over ten thousand of Westchester County's almost seventeen thousand pistol license holders sought and were granted the ability to have their names and addresses shielded from public disclosure.

"Making Government Easy" remains the pledge of the Office of the Westchester County Clerk. We recognize that Westchester residents lead busy lives and cannot always visit our office to conduct their business. And when they do make it to our office, we want to be sure we are able to give them the time and attention they need

It remains a pleasure to serve you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy C. Idoni".

Timothy C. Idoni

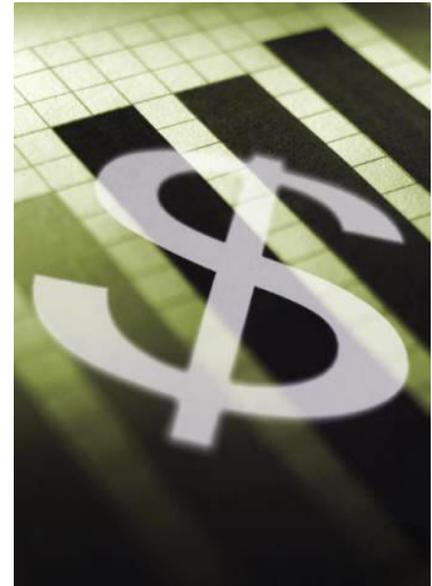
*Westchester County Clerk*

# 2013



## Professional Management Saves Tax Dollars

The Office of the Westchester County Clerk continues to run more effectively and efficiently each year. By harnessing innovative technologies, we have been able to lower the cost of government while improving the experience of our customers. And Westchester residents who do not use our office also benefit as our office now collects significantly more revenue than it spends. The Office of the Westchester County Clerk, like so many municipal offices throughout the country, will continue to face financial challenges. However, we remain committed to improving service while reducing costs.



**Drastic Reductions in Overtime and Hourly Costs:** As government offices throughout the country continue to struggle to contain overtime costs, the County Clerk's Office has drastically reduced the cost of supplemental staffing. A ninety-seven percent (97%) drop in costs has been achieved over the past six years through personnel management and careful monitoring of overtime usage. Curbing reliance on overtime has taken place alongside improvements to customer service.

**Operating Costs Continue to Drop:** For the sixth straight year, total budgeted expenses were reduced, resulting in a nineteen percent (19%) reduction in budgeted expenses since 2006. In real dollars, the 2006 budget requested \$9,243,660 in appropriations, while only \$7,483,731 was requested to operate in 2014. *When the 2006 budget is adjusted by the Consumer Price Index for urban costs, the savings total over three and a half million dollars.*

**Lean Staffing Contributes to Ongoing Savings:** The Office of the County Clerk is serving the public more quickly and efficiently with fewer staff members. Overall staffing has been reduced by twenty-nine percent (29%), from one hundred and ten (110) staffers in 2006 to seventy-eight (78) staffers proposed for 2014. All reductions of permanent staffing have been made through attrition and without layoffs. *The cumulative five-year savings resulting from fifteen full time position cuts totals over \$4.2 million.*



The Office of the Westchester County Clerk has embraced technology in an effort to improve services while simultaneously reducing the cost of this government office. During 2013, the office was able to build upon successes of the past by expanding participation in electronic recording and expanding the reach of electronic filing of court records. In addition, the office began to rely on electronic images as the permanent record copy of filings, rather than storing the paper-based copies.

**Electronic Recording Initiative Receives Best of New York Honor:** Top technology leaders from across New York State come together each September in Albany to meet and exchange knowledge about technology updates and innovations. The Center for Digital Government, a national research institute and advocate for best practices in state and local government, takes the opportunity to present awards, called the Best of New York, which recognize works of distinction in information technology. In 2013, Westchester County Clerk Timothy C. Itoni accepted a Best of New York award for the Best In-House Developed Application for the Electronic Recording portal developed in conjunction with the Westchester County Department of Information Technology. Electronic recording has been a tremendous success in Westchester County, shortening recording times from days to hours. Errors are corrected more quickly, often in the same day. Document control is improved as original documents are retained by the submitter and cannot be lost or misplaced during transit to and from a recording office. Customers who choose to electronically record no longer pay the cost of postage, overnight mail or courier charges. The County Clerk's Office has eliminated the cost of mailing back rejected and recorded documents, as well as the costs associated with scanning documents. Over one quarter of all land records were electronically recorded by the end of 2013.

**Partnership with Office of Court Administration Expands:** Westchester County continues to be a state-wide leader when it comes to the electronic filing of court records, serving as the only county in New York State where matrimonial actions were filed electronically in 2013. The Legal Division, which handles hundreds of court filings a day, is now receiving over eighty percent of all new cases electronically. In 2013 alone, the office received 258,634 court filings electronically. Attorneys and pro se litigants can access the system twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and no longer have to travel to White Plains to file papers in electronically filed cases. In addition, electronic filing of civil cases saves tax dollars because these filings move more efficiently throughout our office as well as to the courts and customers, the cost of scanning is eliminated, the cost of postage to mail rejected or completed documents back to customers is eliminated, and the cost of storage is significantly reduced as the storage of electronic records costs less than the storage of paper records.

**Relying On Scanned Images of Court Records Improves Service:** Scanning court records has proven to be a tremendous benefit to our customers who now have online access to many of the records they need from a home or office. In addition, by creating scanned images of each court filing, we are able to store the electronic image rather than the paper document, reducing the cost of records storage. An in-house developed application supports the detailed review of each scanned document to be sure the scan is clear and complete before it is committed to microfilm.

In order to help Westchester County to grow its significant and diverse commercial base, the Office of the Westchester County Clerk needs to provide business professionals with the resources and level of service that will help businesses prosper. By providing the ability to view public records online, submit land records electronically, and file certain court papers twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week, business professionals can feel confident that our office wants to support their efforts to do business in Westchester County.



**21<sup>st</sup> Century Solutions Facilitate Commerce:** Innovative technological solutions implemented throughout the Office of the Westchester County Clerk contribute to the stability of commerce in Westchester County. When closing documents can be scanned, uploaded and submitted for recording in a matter of minutes, real estate transactions occur more smoothly providing purchasers with the knowledge that their ownership interests are on record and lenders with the confidence that their interests are also secured. When court filings become public record quickly and can be viewed from a home or office, those doing business in Westchester County quickly have the information they need to make informed decisions. And when legal professionals no longer need to travel to White Plains to file with the court, they can provide services to their clients more quickly and at a lower cost.

**Partnership with eDocNY Provides Jobs and Helps Disabled Residents Achieve Their Potential:** In April of 2013, the Office of the Westchester County Clerk received a Business Partnership Award from Arc of Westchester. The award recognized our office for its role in creating opportunities for a significant number of people who have developmental disabilities and are residents of Westchester County through its use of eDocNY, a subsidiary of Arc, which scans court records. Not only does the partnership give people with developmental disabilities the opportunity to achieve their potential in the workplace, but the partnership accounted for a savings of over \$100,000 in the first year alone and allows county dollars to be spent right here in Westchester.

**Mortgage Libers from the 1950s Scanned with Help of State Grant:** In 2013, White Plains based eDocNY, a subsidiary of Westchester Arc completed the scanning of over 600,000 pages of mortgages which were then indexed by staffers in the Office of the Westchester County Clerk. This project was funded in part with a grant from the New York State Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund (LGRMIF). The result is that large volumes containing images of mortgages recorded during the 1950's no longer need to be delivered by the Elmsford Records Center to our White Plains office when a title searcher needs to view the terms of the mortgage. Instead, an image of the mortgage can be viewed online within seconds via Westchester Records Online where images of hundreds of thousands of other land records are also available. As the real estate market in Westchester County gains momentum, it is critically important that real estate professionals have timely access to the resources they need.



Westchester County Clerk  
Timothy C. Idoni

## Need a U.S. passport?

*Let us help you apply.*

Our community outreach staff can help you apply for a passport, including taking your picture. . . .

Where:

When:

Please Note: You will need to have a passport to enter the United States by air, by land or by sea unless you are a child under the age of 16 entering by land or sea with proof of U.S. citizenship or an adult with another travel document approved by the Department of Homeland Security.

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“Making Government Easy” remains the pledge of the Office of the Westchester County Clerk. We recognize that Westchester residents lead busy lives and cannot always visit our office to conduct their business. And when they do make it to our office, we want to be sure we are able to give them the time and attention they need. In 2013, we were particularly proud to meet the needs of our county residents in the following ways:

**A Focus on Families for our 2013 Mobile Office Tour:** Each year, beginning in the early spring, our mobile office appears throughout the county to accept United States passport applications. This year our focus was on family travel. We recognize that it is not always convenient for parents to miss work or their children to be absent from school to apply for a passport. As a result, many of our outreach

appearances were held on dates and at events including community festivals and fairs that were convenient for families. We kicked off the 2013 season on Saturday, March 9<sup>th</sup> hosting Passport Day in the USA in front of our White Plains Office. Our community outreach staff was on hand with our fully equipped mobile office to accept passport applications, take photos and provide passport information. In 2013, our community outreach staff made forty-five visits to local cities, towns and villages and closed out the 2013 season having accepted 893 passport applications out in the community.

**A Wonderful Experience for our Newest Citizens:** Two friends from Jamaica who completed their journey for United States citizenship together and an active P.T.A. mom from Israel were just three of the one hundred and twenty-seven new citizens naturalized on October 9, 2013 in a ceremony conducted by the Office of the Westchester County Clerk. Westchester County Clerk Timothy C. Idoni proudly administers the Oath of Citizenship to new citizens twice a month at the Richard J. Daronco Courthouse in White Plains. By conducting these ceremonies more frequently, our newest citizens can be joined by friends, family and colleagues on this very special day. Naturalization is the process by which United States citizenship is conferred upon a foreign citizen or national after he or she fulfills the requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). These requirements include a period of residency within the United States, the ability to read, write and speak English, and an understanding of United States history. In addition, all naturalization applicants must demonstrate good moral character.

**WestchesterClerk.com Provides Guidance All Day, Every Day:** The WestchesterClerk.com website provides twenty-four hour access to the Office of the Westchester County Clerk. Visitors to the website will find user-friendly access to services, information, forms and links. Users can find the answers to frequently asked questions, the latest county clerk news, download forms and passport applications, and view the latest community outreach calendar. The website also serves as a gateway to the Westchester County Clerk’s online applications such as the Property Records Electronic Portal (PREP) System where land records can be electronically submitted or the New York State Courts Electronic Filing (NYSCEF) System where court papers can be electronically filed or searched. Website design was completed by an in-house team consisting of staff members from the County Clerk’s Office and a talented team in the Westchester County Department of Information Technology.



The Office of the Westchester County Clerk receives papers which have a significant impact on the lives of Westchester residents. When a home is purchased, the deed is recorded with our office. When a marriage ends, the divorce judgment is entered in our office. The people impacted by these transactions often look to our office for assistance in protecting their interests. And while we cannot offer legal advice, we can often connect a resident with someone who is able to assist them.

**As Foreclosure Filings Climb, Westchester Residents in Danger of Foreclosure are Urged to Seek Qualified Assistance:** In 2013, the Office of the Westchester County Clerk documented dramatic growth in the number of foreclosure filings which surpassed the totals in each of the last three years. As foreclosure actions are started by filing papers in the Office of the Westchester County Clerk, many homeowners turn to this office for assistance. As a result, the County Clerk raises awareness among those at risk of foreclosure by providing consumer alerts and information regarding assistance available throughout Westchester. Residents are directed to appropriate non-profit organizations and the Federal Housing and Urban Development office for assistance with keeping their homes. The Office of the Westchester County Clerk also assists in providing statistical data to support requests for government aid to assist in addressing the foreclosure crisis.

**County Clerk's Office Accepts Over 10,000 Pistol License Opt Out Forms:** The NY SAFE Act, signed into law in mid-January, not only tightened gun laws throughout New York State, but also provided a process for pistol licensees to shield their names and addresses from public disclosure. Prior to the passage of this legislation, any person or group could request the name and address of a pistol licensee through a FOIL (Freedom of Information Law) request. The law now allows licensees to "opt-out" by completing a NYS Firearms License Request for Public Records Exemption form, exempting their name and address from the public record. Over ten thousand of Westchester County's almost seventeen thousand pistol license holders sought and were granted the ability to have their names and addresses shielded from public disclosure.

**2013 Senior Center Tour Focuses on Protecting our Older Residents:**

In 2013, the Westchester County Clerk met with over eight hundred and fifty seniors at sixteen senior centers throughout Westchester County. One of the key topics discussed was the prevalence of scams targeting seniors, including deed and mortgage scams. The County Clerk offered valuable tips for avoiding these scams and offered instructions for obtaining inexpensive copies of land records, such as deeds, from the County Clerk's Office.



The County Clerk also highlighted a service that is available to veterans. Because military papers can get damaged or lost, we urged veterans to file their military discharge papers in our office for safe-keeping, free of cost. The County Clerk also reminded seniors of the importance of hiring licensed and insured tradesman and urged seniors to call our office at (914) 995-3082 or visit [www.westchesterclerk.com](http://www.westchesterclerk.com) to learn whether the plumber or electrician they wish to hire is properly licensed.



## 2013 Facts and Figures

*The following facts and figures below are provided to show the volume and diversity of the services our staff members perform as employees of the Office of the Westchester County Clerk:*

### **Our Land Records Division Revenue:**

- \$ 90,233,822.82 in Mortgage Tax collected
- \$ 52,145,584.34 in New York State Transfer Tax collected
- \$ 8,110,907.80 in Westchester County Recording Fees collected

### **Our Legal Division by the Numbers:**

- 14,185 court documents certified
- 8,897 transcripts of judgment filed
- 9,410 judgments entered in Westchester County
- 6,477 notary authentications issued
- 2,730 business certificates registered
- 2,273,784 pages scanned for improved public access

### **Our Licensing Division by the Numbers:**

- 5,704 passport applications processed
- 2,996 plumbing and electrical licenses issued or renewed
- 2,911 new citizens sworn in by the Westchester County Clerk
- 309 conservation licenses issued

### **Serving Our Community:**

- 45 community appearances in Westchester municipalities
- 893 passport applications processed out in the community
- 857 seniors met with at 16 senior programs and centers throughout Westchester County

# Overview of the Office of the Westchester County Clerk

## The Office of the Westchester County Clerk

The County Clerk is the oldest elected office in Westchester County, having been established in 1683. For over 300 years, the County Clerk has served the people of our county by maintaining and preserving the official documents and records of its rich history. The Westchester County Clerk is the Registrar of county land transactions and liens as well as the Clerk of the Supreme and County Courts. The position is both a County Official and a New York State Constitutional Officer. The Office of the Westchester County Clerk is located at 110 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. in White Plains and is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding legal holidays.

## Legal Division

The Westchester County Clerk is the Clerk for the Supreme and County Courts. All records for these courts are recorded and filed with the Legal Division. This division is also responsible for non-court related county legal functions such as registering a business, filing a lien, applying to serve as a Notary Public, registering a domestic partnership, filing veterans' military discharge papers, and accepting Small Claims Assessment Review petitions. The public can visit the Legal Division to look up legal records, judgments, liens, lis pendens, and other business records.

## Land Records Division

The Land Records Division of the County Clerk's office records all documents pertaining to real property transactions occurring in the County of Westchester. This division also processes New York State Mortgage Tax, New York State Transfer Gains Tax, Federal Tax liens, Uniform Commercial Code filings, and is home to our Map Division. The public can visit the Land Records Division to look up a current mortgage or deed, and even research documents dating back to the colonial days of Westchester.

## Naturalization, Passport and Licensing Division

The Naturalization, Passport and Licensing Division handles a series of varied tasks. The Westchester County Clerk has the privilege of administering the Oath of Allegiance to the United States to newly naturalized citizens. In addition, this division acts as an agent of the United States Department of State to process passport applications. Finally, this division oversees trades licensing for electricians and plumbers, acts as an agent of the New York State Conservation Department to issue fishing, hunting and trapping licenses, and maintains and recertifies pistol permit applications.