

# Illinois county spends \$353,000 on digitizing its records

## The work will be covered by American Rescue Plan funds



Marshall County Clerk Jill Kenyon stands alongside a floor-to-ceiling wall of bound property records in her office in Lacon.

Sometime early this fall, a team armed with specialized document-scanning equipment will descend on the Marshall County Courthouse to transform 350,000 pages of property records dating to 1831 into digital form.

The scanning will be part of a \$353,000 larger overall process in which Iowa-based Fidlar Technologies will also replace computer hardware and software in county clerk and recorder Jill Kenyon's office, eventually resulting in expanding and overhauling much of the way that business gets done there.

The work will be covered by roughly one-third of the county's \$1.1 million American Rescue Plan allotment for this year, under action taken by a unanimous board vote on July 8.

It marks the county's first use of those funds. A board committee has just begun a process for considering other projects, the *Journal Star* of Peoria reports.

***"I believe it's going to be money well spent," Marshall County Clerk Jill Kenyon. "It's something that's going to have to be done, and I feel if it can be paid for with a grant, it's better for the taxpayers."***

For the first time, it will be possible for people to e-record documents remotely and for attorneys, banks, title companies or other searchers to access the records online for fees that will generate new revenue for the county.

Over a period of about 15 days, working 24 hours a day in 12-hour shifts, the team from Michigan-based US Imaging will scan deeds, plats, mortgages and every other type of recorded property document, as well as vital records including birth, death and marriage certificates.

"We get calls daily asking, 'Are you online?'" Kenyon said, reflecting the increasingly common assumption that records can be accessed that way.

The negative reply puts the county in a shrinking minority in the state. Fidlar alone provides such services to 72 Illinois counties, company official Greg Bachman told the board. They include nearby Stark, Tazewell and Woodford counties.

The question became especially pressing during the COVID-19 pandemic, when public access to the courthouse was limited. For instance, space limitations in a vault where many of the records are kept dictated that access was limited to one person at a time, by appointment only.

Online access "would have been nice during the pandemic," Kenyon said, because it would have allowed that part of her office operation to continue pretty much as usual.

She has confirmed the COVID-related stimulus funds can be used for the planned conversion.

"These projects do qualify for this grant," she told the board.

Not all of the digitized documents will be available for online viewing. Vital records are restricted in various ways, so they will be stored on a separate county server.

People will "be able to go online to request and pay for a copy," Kenyon said, "but they can't physically get on and see it."

The Fidlar system allows occasional users to access property records online for certain periods of time, while frequent users can purchase subscriptions for more extensive use. The participating county receives the revenue.

The amount of money generated can depend on several variables but will tend to increase over time as the service becomes better known, company representative Danielle Westerfield said. Some counties might get \$50,000 a year, while others reach six digits, she said.

The project will also guard against the scenario that could ensue if the records were destroyed in a disaster — a tornado, a fire, a massive water leak — that could essentially paralyze real estate transactions, said Kenyon and others.

"It would be an absolute nightmare," said State's Attorney Patrick Murphy, whose previous law practice included property law. "I can't even imagine how detrimental it would be to lose all that."

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## County News

**Lee County Board** will revisit allowing UTVs on county roads. According to the proposed ordinance, UTVs would be allowed on county roads from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m. Riders must obey the Illinois Vehicle Code and be at least 16 with a driver's license. Vehicle requirements, permit fees and fines may also apply.

The **Will County Board** voted to move forward with the construction of a new \$7 million morgue to be built near the Will County Public Safety Complex in Joliet Township.

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It's that type of nightmare that concerns Justin Meierkord, president of Marshall County Title Co. in Lacon.

Meierkord said he or associate Nikki Lemons will typically be in the courthouse every day for research. The online access will be useful when someone outside the area calls with fairly simple requests for copies of specific documents, he said, though he expects to continue the regular trips across town for many purposes.

"I'm more old school. I like looking at the original documents," he explained, then quickly added that he would welcome the security provided by the digital conversion. "Personally, my main concern is what would happen if the courthouse burned down." Unless the original records are destroyed in some way, they'll remain after the digitization is completed, Kenyon said.

Fidlar provides backup copies of all documents at four locations, according to company official Bachman. That guards against loss of the data not only through physical disaster but also through hacking, which he said has never happened but is regarded as a danger in today's cyberworld.

When asked about the risk of old documents being damaged in the scanning process itself, US Imaging official Josh Dossan said the company would be responsible for any damage that occurred, but the use of sophisticated equipment made damage very unlikely. US Imaging specializes in digitizing county documents and has done so for 850 counties nationwide, including 50 for Fidlar in Illinois, he said.

Business has been brisk among counties making the transition, resulting in a backlog of work, Bachman said. It will probably be about two months before the crews get to Marshall County, he estimated.

"Best-case scenario, we could have everything up and running by fall," he said.

The scanning process is not expected to interfere with normal on-site work being done by local searchers.

*(Associated Press) Gary Smith/Journal Star, [www.pjstar.com](http://www.pjstar.com).*

## DuPage County wins budget award

DuPage County received a Distinguished Budget Award from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), the highest form of recognition in government budgeting. The budget is reviewed annually to assess how well it meets nationally recognized guidelines as a policy document, financial plan, an operations guide, and a communications device.

"DuPage County is committed to fiscal responsibility and transparency when it comes to our budgeting process. It's gratifying to see our efforts recognized by this national award," said Finance Committee Chairwoman Liz Chaplin.



## In Memory



### William Haine Madison County

Former Madison County State's Attorney and Illinois State Senator William "Bill" Haine died August 16 at 77-years-old.

Bill served as State's Attorney from 1988 until 2002, when he was appointed as a Senator of the 56th District, to replace Sen. Evelyn Bowles. He served until 2018 and chose not to run for re-election after he was diagnosed with blood cancer.

Bill served his country in the Vietnam War from 1967 to 1969. After his Army service, he received his juris doctorate degree from the Saint Louis University School of Law and was a member of the law firm Bono and Haine in Wood River.

Bill was elected to the Madison County Board in 1978 and again in 1982 and 1986. He also was the chair for the Metro East Transit District Board of Trustees from 1981 to 1988.

Active in civic organizations, Bill was a member of the Alton Cemetery Board of Trustees, Illinois State Bar Association, Knights of Columbus, Saint Anthony Hospital Health Center Board, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. He is a former commander of American Legion Post 204.

Bill and his wife, Anna, have seven children. His son, Tom Haine, is the current Madison County State's Attorney.

## Kane County urges veterans to seek out local resources

### Veterans



"As always but perhaps even more so now, Kane County is here to support its veterans who may need assistance as a result of the sudden U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan," Kane County Board Chair Madam Corinne Pierog said. "The Kane County Veterans Assistance Commission does an outstanding job of serving our nation's heroes and has put together a list of local resources that are here to assist our veterans during these uncertain times," she said.

Check out the wide variety of benefits available to veterans in Kane County at <https://www.countyofkane.org/Pages/veterans.aspx>.

**There are more than 20,000 veterans in Kane County and officials are encouraging any who may need help coping with the unrest in Afghanistan to seek out local resources for assistance.**

