



# The Scribe

THE BI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER BY TCCA

DECEMBER 2020

## A RECAP ON ALL COURT THINGS IN 2020

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TEXAS COURT CLERKS ASSOCIATION

# A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

**LANDRA SOLANSKY**



I want to thank each of you for your continued support of TCCA. The TCCA Board and Committee volunteers spend countless hours of their personal time to make this association successful. I am grateful for each and everyone one of them and their dedication and willingness to serve.

A special “thank you” to outgoing Board Members **April Christiansen** and **Stacie Chitty**. April has served this Board for several years as the Central Texas Chapter President and most recently as the TCCA Vice-President & TML Representative, we will forever be grateful for her many contributions. Stacie served as the Northeast Texas Chapter President for a short time. We appreciate Stacie’s willingness to serve her Chapter by filling that role when her former Chapter President resigned.

I hope you will join me in welcoming first time Board Members **Chad Eixmann**, City of Bryan and **Debbie Landrum**, City of Fair Oaks Ranch. Chad is the new Central Texas Chapter President and Debbie is the new Place #2 Director at Large.

We also have a few Clerks that remain on the Board in different or additional roles. **Tiffany Totah**, City of Victoria, is the new South Texas Chapter President, **Lisa Sechrest**, City of Quinlan, is the new Northeast Chapter President in addition to her current role as Director at Large Place #5 and **Jennifer Bozorgnia**, City of Irving, was re-elected as the North Texas Chapter President in addition to her current role as TCCA Vice President.

TCCA hosted its first Virtual Business Meeting October 23, 2020. This would not have been possible if it wasn’t for the dedication of Technology Committee Members **Jeremy Leonard** and **Kimberly Kierce**. A very special “thank you” for the countless hours they spent making this happen! I also want to thank **Lisa Howard** and **Jennifer Bozorgnia** for monitoring the questions for us during the meeting, it truly took a village to pull this off! We appreciate all the members that took the time to attend the meeting and interact with the poll questions. We received amazing feedback from those in attendance.

The Covid-19 pandemic turned our personal and professional worlds upside down. In an instant, we closed our Courts to the public, became full time teachers to our children and changed the way we lived our lives.

I usually try to find the silver lining in every situation, sometimes that silver lining includes a reminder that change is good. My testimony to turning Covid-19 into something positive is a perfect example. Some of you were already utilizing curbside pickup at the grocery stores and most of us were enjoying the convenience of on-line shopping when the pandemic hit. Others, like me, could not imagine pulling into the parking lot of my local grocery store to have a complete stranger, that has done the personal shopping for **my** family, load those items into the car and send me on my way. I was against the idea of someone else picking the fruits and vegetables I would serve to my family!

And then, it happened... one of the GREATEST days of my life, September 16, 2020! I was getting ready for the TCCA Education Committee meeting and needed to pick up the food for the weekend. In a time- crunch, I ordered the items online, gave them my preferred pick-up time and cruised out of that parking lot in less than 10 minutes with a carload full of groceries. No lines, no price check issues, no loading heavy bags into my car, the list goes on and on!

It happened so fast and the process was so easy, I haven’t stepped foot back in a grocery store since. All it took was me realizing it was okay to change the way I do things, even when it is uncomfortable or completely out of my normal routine.

I share this story with you because I think it is relevant to what we have all been through since March. The pandemic forced us to change the way we do business and we have learned some valuable lessons as a result. TCCA has experienced the same transformation and challenges and will continue to look for ways to serve our members in the best way possible.

The year 2020 will go down in the record books for many reasons. When we reflect on the hardships we faced, I hope we will also realize the opportunities those same hardships presented to us.

I hope you all have a Happy Thanksgiving, a Merry Christmas and an amazing New Year!

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## **COVID-19; The Ugly, Bad and Good.**

By. Andrea Goff Fontanes, CMCC  
City of Helotes Municipal Court Administrator

Yes, 2020 has been anything but the most interesting year we have ever experienced. We were all thrown into a new reality of change and handling stress in a whole new way. A year ago, today, we were all living in our own happy world, no doubt in sight that our world would be put to a stop in no time. For us, in the court world, this is unheard of and certainly unfathomable. Eternally tied down by tradition, orders, rules of law, and anything else to conform to through legislative changes. Of course, there are also those of us given the dreaded terms of 'we've always done it that way' and 'if it ain't broke why fix it'. Then came along COVID-19 where our comfortable and "normal" reality has been turned upside down bringing out the Good, the Bad and the Ugly upon us.

Let's start with the ugly first. The ugly was the breaking point of every parent being told that their kids would not be returning back to school after spring break and have been involuntarily recruited to teach their kids from home. Figuring out math problems for a fourth grader with math that you most likely saw in high school or college will bring you into full panic mode. Parents are not all equal in this department and not all are able to adhere to these tasks without losing it in front of your children, this is not pretty. Good luck to our children too for putting up with us arguing with the computer to get their assignments turned in on time.

For those that aren't parents that had to deal with school and kids, you still had to deal with being quarantined. Being told to stay locked away resorted to your panic mode state, no one likes to be told to stay put, after all we are in the "land of the free", right? Locked up with either your significant other, parent's, pets, or anything else you can put in mind, you were starting to lose it after the first week or so of being told to stay inside. As you were locked away from the rest of the world, worrying ensued and thoughts such as, "if you had enough toilet paper to last during your confinement." If you did need toilet paper at that time, good luck finding it as we were in a shortage since everyone else panicked all at once about toilet paper usage, this was the ugly folks.

Now from the ugly, we go to the bad. Finding out if you are made to accept these adjustments to our everyday lives that have been bestowed upon us by COVID-19. As we slowly started to get back into the world again, we keep thinking to ourselves, "when will we be normal again?" The horizon is ever so bleak and we are in a new complexity of "normal".

**Continued on the next page....**

## **COVID-19; The Ugly, Bad and Good. Continued.....**

Texas is so diverse and we are all from different backgrounds. Different areas of Texas, experiencing different levels of panic and reassurance from both our state and local government officials. The faraway places, were not so worried since they have room to stretch and can't see another neighbor for miles on end.

The opposite from the faraway places are those so condensed that we could hear our neighbor sneeze from across the way (*by the way we are all going to be afraid to sneeze in public again without someone thinking you are infected with COVID-19*). *Since there are so many varied areas this put some of us at an advantage or disadvantage, depending on who is doing the analyzing.*

In reference to court environments, for those areas that are big "city" surroundings, some of the technology was already set in place to start adjusting to changes that were ordered upon us. Setting up Zoom hearings at a drop of the dime was seamless for these larger areas. Don't get me wrong, I am not insinuating that all of the big courts had this all set out for them, but making a general observation, most of the big metropolitan areas have the infrastructure in place for this to be a successful endeavor. For those in smaller areas, this was a big challenge to accept and accommodate for in such a small amount of time. I am sure to this day, that there are those rural courts that are still having trouble accommodating for remote hearings, the most important factor is the lack of a stable infrastructure to handle the technology needed to succeed in this endeavor.

March 13, 2020 Governor Abbott put out the first emergency orders, declaring a state of disaster for all 254 counties in Texas. Shortly after the declaration, the Supreme Court of Texas put out emergency orders for all courts, basically putting us all at a standstill. We all took to our reading, researched, and started asking our questions. Whether you wanted to or not you had to accept the challenge. All of us collectively, in both the big and small places had to make due with what we had available to us to proceed as best we could and move forward.

The good that came out of it, finding out that we are up to the challenge and we can do it! Sure, figuring out all the tech side of things made you start to lose your mind by the one hundredth webinar on learning how to set up a virtual court, but we continued on. Another thought for you to think about are the constant reminders to individuals in the virtual courtroom, "that you are in court please put a shirt on or if you are driving please safely pull over and park your vehicle until your hearing is completed." Court has never been so far from being dull in this new digital age. Who would have thought we would have missed out on so much diversity, challenges and the ever-constant feeling of learning something new everyday from holding Zoom hearings?

**Continued on the next page.....**

## COVID-19; The Ugly, Bad and Good. Continued.....

It truly has been a day by day process since the beginning of the pandemic, every day something changed and we had to persevere. Whether you are a lone court clerk in your city or a court administrator with several under your wing, you are the one that has to make it work. Most of us small town courts know this is a given in our world, we don't have 24/7 access for IT (information technology) to help and train us on setting up our tech needs, a lot of the time we are on our own. We learn as we go. I can't even tell you the number of times I have researched and watched YouTube videos or read IT blogs to help me develop a plan and learn how to set something up that we needed in court.

As a court administrator or a clerk, you take the unknown and make it work. You always think about how it will work and what will work for all those involved in the process. Setting up virtual court was not a walk in the park for us all and getting individuals to comply has been interesting. Most individuals, surprisingly adapted and accepted the new routine with ease. A lot of the time, your effort and the time it took you to figure it all out will go unnoticed, but you know that you set them up to succeed regardless and it goes so seamlessly that it is as if you haven't done anything, but that's usually how it goes in our line of work, doesn't it?

Accept the challenge, survive and adapt. We are all in this together and we are all here to help each other get through these uncertain and challenging times. We are the good that has come out of this, remember that we have gotten this far and haven't run away, yet! For those that haven't been told yet, "You are awesome, you have gone through this pandemic seamlessly and are doing a great job! Keep up the hard work and keep on learning!"

I want to know what your thoughts, comments or experiences have been like during the pandemic so far, send me an email at: [agoff@helotes-tx.gov](mailto:agoff@helotes-tx.gov) or reach out to the publications committee chair, Tiffany Totah, CMCC at: [ttotah@victoriatx.gov](mailto:ttotah@victoriatx.gov). Be safe and take care everyone.



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# 2020 ELECTION RESULTS... ARE IN

## 2020 STATE ELECTION AND BY LAW RESULTS

- President: Landra Solansky (Seguin)
- Secretary: Jennifer Dorsett (Watauga)
- Director At Large:
  - Place 2: Debbie Landrum (Fair Oaks Ranch)
  - Place 4: Robin Shellard (New Braunfels)
  - Place 6: Jeremy Leonard (Lewisville)
- Bylaw Amendments: All Passed

## 2020 CHAPTER ELECTION RESULTS

### Central Texas:

- President: Chad Eixmann (Bryan)
- Secretary: Crystal Martinez (Cedar Park)

### Freedom Trail:

- President: Andrea Goff (Helotes)
- Secretary: Maribel Garcia (San Antonio)

### Gulf Coast:

- President: Christina Dahse (Willis)
- Secretary: Courtney Broussard (Woodville)

### North Texas:

- President: Jennifer Bozorgnia (Irving)
- Secretary: Melissa Rodriguez (Haltom City)
- Director At Large:
  - Juan Paredes (Ft. Worth)
  - Lamysa Laney (Ft. Worth)

### Northeast Texas:

- President: Lisa Sechrest (Quinlan)
- Secretary: Cindy Beall (Longview)

### South Texas:

- President: Tiffany Totah (Victoria)
- Secretary: Amanda Ellis (Cuero)
- Director At Large: Crystal Vasquez (SPI)

### West Texas

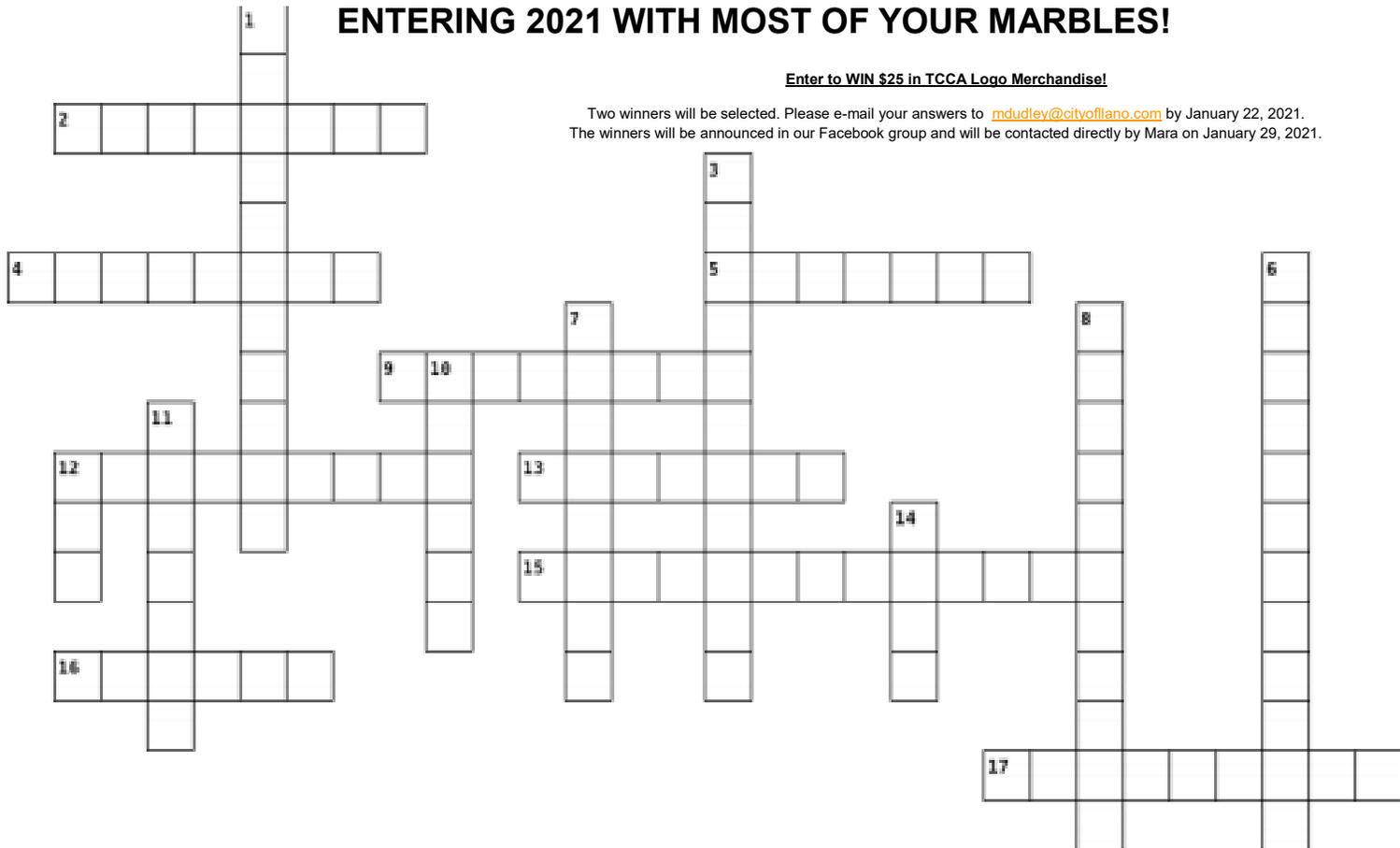
- President: Vacant
- Secretary: Vacant



# ENTERING 2021 WITH MOST OF YOUR MARBLES!

Enter to WIN \$25 in TCCA Logo Merchandise!

Two winners will be selected. Please e-mail your answers to [mdudley@cityoflano.com](mailto:mdudley@cityoflano.com) by January 22, 2021. The winners will be announced in our Facebook group and will be contacted directly by Mara on January 29, 2021.



## Across

2. To lose this is to lose the battle
4. If Plan A doesn't work, this has 25 more letters
5. A 2021 Chapter Steering Committee goal is to \_\_\_\_\_ chapter level virtual education opportunities and meetings
9. Alone we can do so little, \_\_\_\_\_ we can do so much
12. Some people look for a \_\_\_\_\_ place, others make a place beautiful
13. \_\_\_\_\_ court hearings bring improved access to justice
15. Courts with tightened budgets and potential TCCA members may benefit from the Membership \_\_\_\_\_ Letter
16. Upcoming virtual educational opportunities are found on the \_\_\_\_\_ calendar tab on the TCCA website
17. Confucius does this with a pen. Be like Confucius

## Down

1. It comes in handy if you are a gymnast or a court clerk
3. New challenges bring great \_\_\_\_\_
6. March 1-5, 2021 is Membership \_\_\_\_\_ Week
7. Is yours worth catching?
8. Logic will get you from A-Z, but this will get you everywhere
10. This store was a first this year for visitors to the TCCA website
11. I may not have lost all of them yet, but there's a small hole in the bag
12. Jack thinks outside of it too
14. Jeremy Leonard had this when appointed to the technology committee



## Meet Your Education Committee

Written by: Pat Riffel, Chair

The “Certification and Educational Programs Committee”, fondly referred to as “The Education Committee” is a permanent standing committee of the Texas Court Clerks Association. By-Laws state the Education Committee *“shall be responsible for the planning and development of the educational program at the annual meeting, and such other educational and developmental programs. The Education Committee shall be responsible for the approval of certification credit hours provided for the purpose of continuing education for the Clerk’s Certification Program. This committee shall serve as the decision-making body for the certification program.”*

The Education Committee is made up of members of the three partner agencies in the Clerk Certification Program: Texas Court Clerks Association (TCCA), Texas Municipal Courts Association/Texas Municipal Court Education Center (TMCA/TMCEC) and Texas State University.

The TCCA members are; Chair (appointed by the President), Co-Chair (sitting President), active past presidents and members from respective areas around the state. Current members are Pat Riffel (Chair), Landra Solansky (Co-Chair), Lisa Howard (Certification Coordinator), Tammy Odom (Testing Coordinator), Matthew Freeman (Agency Liaison), Jennifer Bozorgnia (Chapter Education Liaison) and Tracy Ventura Mentor Coordinator).

The TMCEC members are: TMCEC Executive Director, Certification Program Coordinator and a Program Attorney. A member representative of the TMCA Education Committee also sits on this committee.

Current Members are Ryan K. Turner, Lily Pebworth and Mark Goodner. Bonnie Townsend serves as TMCA representative.

Texas State University appoints a member of their Criminal Justice program to this committee. The current member is Dr. Jaymi Eliass

The responsibilities of the Education Committee are found in TCCA By-Laws, as well as Policies and Procedures of the Education Committee. The Committee meets at least 3 times per year. One meeting is held in conjunction with the TCCA Mid-Year Board meeting, second meeting is funded and scheduled by TMCEC and a fall meeting is the responsibility of the committee. The Committee recently revised and reorganized the policies and procedures, and they will be published at the beginning of the new year.

Funding of the Education Committee comes exclusively from testing fees, membership dues are not used for Education Committee Expenses. The Education Committee has an independent Certification Program Financial Manager. This position performs all the duties as treasurer for the Education Committee and Certification Program. There is a separate bank account and a separate set of books. Updates are sent to the TCCA Treasurer and President on a monthly basis—and the books are subject to full audit by the TCCA Audit Committee. The Budget and General Ledger of the Education Committee are posted on the TCCA Website and updated monthly.

If you have any questions and/or comments please feel free to contact any member of the committee listed above.



- ◆ December 4, 2020, South Texas Chapter Virtual Training
- ◆ December 14, 2020, South Texas Chapter Level I Virtual Prep
- ◆ December 15, 2020, South Texas Chapter Level II Virtual Prep
- ◆ February 25, 2021, Gulf Coast Chapter Testing Opportunity in Willis



**TCCA Annual Conference**

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# OMNIBASE

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## Services of Texas, LP

OmniBase Services of Texas maintains and administers the central database for the cities and counties contracted to use the Department of Public Safety's Failure to Appear Program. The FTA program as authorized by Chapter 706 of the Texas Transportation Code, provides an effective collection and enforcement tool by restricting the violator's ability to renew their drivers license for outstanding violations.



## CASA Continues On

When we look back on the year 2020, most of us will have a theme in mind. For CASA for Kids of East Texas, the theme will be, “CASA continued on.” This year, we made necessary changes, pivoted according to the state regulations and changes in our local courts, but our Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) continued to make sure the foster children we serve were contacted, reminded that they are loved, and afforded much-needed connection and representation, even when it needed to be done virtually.

Many of our CASAs had never used Zoom or FaceTime, but because of their desire to make sure the children in their assigned cases were safe and cared for, they learned new skills and got creative with the time they shared. Consistency is key when advocating for a child who has been abused or neglected, and our volunteers and Case Supervisors were willing to be cautious, following all the guidelines put in place, and still be the compassionate voice their children needed through this pandemic.

Foster care can be turbulent, to say the least, for a child of any age, but when you add in masks and restrictions on visits with their family of origin and virtual education, you can see how this year has been especially hard. Having an advocate check in with a child – even if it is over a computer screen – and remind them that everything is going to be okay, reassure them that their family is well, and listen to them talk about what’s happening in their life, can have a positive and powerful impact in the midst of such uncertainty.

Outside of the pandemic CASAs have always strived to be consistent figures in the lives of abused and neglected children. As other people may be coming in and out of a child’s life, a CASA continues to show up, to build that relationship. They make sure the child’s new placement is safe and loving and they provide a trusted outlet for the child to confide any fears, struggles, or concerns.

A CASA also gets to know the people closest to the child and share information with the legal team involved in the case so that the best decisions can be made going forward. These decisions range anywhere from what kind of counseling they might need to what extracurricular activities they might benefit from, as well as factual observation about their placement and wellbeing.

That sounds like a lot for a volunteer position, but the advocate isn’t alone in expressing what’s best for the child. They are supported and encouraged by an experienced CASA Case Supervisor.

**Continues on the next page....**

## CASA Continues On

CASA for Kids of East Texas Advocate of almost four years, Terry Edwards, had this to say when asked about his experience serving Wood County, “I did not know Laura Beam [my CASA Case Supervisor] before I took a case in Wood County, but I knew almost immediately after accepting my first case here that I was in the right place. Laura is great and understanding. I really appreciate her support. I can call her any time for help and advice or whatever I need.”

And as we’ve entered into the “new normal” of 2020, we’re grateful new advocates have come on board to help even while knowing the challenges of not being able to see children face-to-face in many situations due to COVID-19.

“John and I decided in 2020, after seeing a Facebook post, that CASA would be our next journey. We have always been advocates for animals and enjoy helping others,” Lisa Mumby, who was sworn in as a CASA with her husband in July of 2020, said of their decision in the middle of the pandemic. “We both were wondering how to juggle classes into our schedule and because of the coronavirus it became easier for us, they were virtual. Before we knew it we were done and sworn. Being a CASA has been so rewarding to us to be able to make a difference during a time when so much is changing.”

CASAs, both tenured and new, have accepted the challenges the pandemic has created, and, in the best version of themselves, have continued to create memories for the children they serve. We at CASA for Kids of East Texas are grateful for the work they do and will keep doing. It’s why we’re able to say with confidence that CASA continues on.

Is this volunteer opportunity right for you? Contact CASA for Kids of East Texas at 903-597-7725 or [info@casaforkidsofet.org](mailto:info@casaforkidsofet.org) for more information. You can also find us on Facebook, Instagram, and at our website, [www.casaforkidsofet.org](http://www.casaforkidsofet.org).





## **TMCEC Attorneys Discuss Municipal Court in the Time of COVID-19 (Part II)**

The COVID-19 Pandemic has forced courts to re-examine fundamental processes and procedures in unprecedented ways. Six months ago, who would have thought that Texas courts would be, in some cases, conducting all court business remotely? This has raised numerous questions for municipal courts throughout the state.

In Part I, TMCEC Deputy Counsel Robby Chapman and General Counsel Mark Goodner discussed issues that courts would face as the pandemic hit and court shutdowns accelerated 6 months ago. In Part II, the attorneys look at the municipal court world as it now stands and discuss three more questions about the state of the courts as we near the end of the year.

### **1. There are a number of questions on everyone's mind about court operations in the time of COVID-19, but the starting point has to be the Emergency Orders issued by the Texas Supreme Court and Court of Criminal Appeals, right?**

**RC:** Absolutely. When we last spoke, I think we may have been on the Twelfth Emergency Order, issued on April 27, 2020. This was the one that first prohibited courts from conducting in-person proceedings contrary to OCA Guidance. If I remember correctly, it had an optimistic end date of June 1, 2020. At that time, we were talking about operating plans for potential in-person court. We are now on the Twenty-Ninth Emergency Order that ends in 2021! The focus has changed slightly, and now we're looking at the continuation of fully virtual dockets with no in-person jury trials through February 1, 2021. I think this comes from the state's recognition that the pandemic has had a huge effect on the ability of courts to operate as normal.

**MG:** It is hard to believe we have been operating under cloud of COVID-19 for more than eight months now. Yes, the starting point is the Emergency Orders. The Office of Court Administration has done a good job of pushing these out to all of us, but a good place to keep track is the Texas Judicial Branch website ([txcourts.gov](http://txcourts.gov)). It contains a nice bank of resources including information on active Emergency Orders as well as electronic hearings/zoom information, the official court guidance documents, and a list of all submitted operating plans.

**RC:** That website is certainly helpful. If I had to name three documents that would really inform any court operations review process, they would be Emergency Order 29 (November 11, 2020), OCA Court Guidance (October 1, 2020), and the OCA Jury Observations and Recommendations (August 31, 2020). Mark and I discuss these in more depth at this year's TMCEC regional clerks during a keynote that we present together.

## 2. Speaking of TMCEC regional seminars, what should court clerks know about those?

**MG:** Clerks should know that they work! While we have only done two Virtual Regional Clerks seminars so far (East Texas and Central Texas), TMCEC has now hosted more than 10 virtual events and we are proud of the educational experience we can offer. Also, I would say don't wait to get your hours in. While we all have hope to return to in-person training, we just don't know when that will happen. We know for sure that all TMCEC programs will be virtual at least through February 2021. I am really enjoying our virtual seminars. Using chat, we are able to focus on local issues. We also feature a lot of team-teaching, which keeps it interesting especially when we are learning online.

**RC:** I think it is important to note that this is not your father's Oldsmobile. It's a new generation of online learning! Clerks should not expect to click a video recording at the regional and then sit doing nothing for the next hour. As Mark pointed out, our virtual platform, which incorporates Zoom, allows faculty to interact with attendees though chat. This improves certain aspects of traditional learning. In a traditional in-person class, you would have to wait to be called on or may not get your question addressed. Here, the question is visible during class for the speaker to address, for your colleagues to discuss with you in real time during class, or TMCEC attorneys to grab for our Q&A on Day 3! I have also been surprised by how much our discussions and legal topics can shift from one seminar to the next. It is interesting to see how courts in different regionals are facing many of the same issues, but also unique local ones. In our Day 1 Special Session class on disaster planning taught by Pat Riffel and Victoria Medley, for example, other than the obvious COVID-19 disaster, the East Texas Regional clerks highlighted cyber security as a threat due to recent events in that region. Meanwhile, in Central Texas, flooding and wildfires were among the top concerns for clerks and judges due to recent events.

TMCEC continued on the next page.....

### 3. Any takeaways from the roughly 6 months of eCourt and virtual learning?

**RC:** I have been surprised by how fast courts adopted and normalized eCourt. A year ago, none of us could have guessed that entire court dockets would be successfully conducted online. This may be the silver lining in the issues we have all faced in court in 2020. I have heard from court clerks and judges across Texas that by and large court users appreciate the access to court that eCourt provides. Remember when it was an issue that a defendant was out of the country when the bench trial was scheduled, or a juvenile was out of state and couldn't make an in-court appearance to enter a plea? Allowing access to the court electronically has addressed these issues, at least for as long as the emergency orders are in effect. I will be curious to see what the legislature does next year to address eCourt in statutory form. This was not always true, but it seems the technology is now at a level to make some aspect of eCourt more routine in the future.

**MG:** Technology allows us to accomplish what we need to without missing a beat (or at least not too many beats). We often talk after legislative sessions that the law typically lags far behind technology—remember it was just a few years ago that our statutes dropped the use of telegraphs for forwarding warrants!—but now with the emergency orders we have the opportunity to embrace technology both in the court and in the classroom. While I hope for and expect a return to handling a lot of things in person, COVID-19 will really change everyone's expectations and thoughts about what is appropriate and possible to handle remotely. I imagine much of these new practices will stick with us (with legislative action), and we should be ready for it. Although, I do miss seeing everyone in person!

**RC:** I certainly agree with that. Looking forward to eventually seeing everyone in person, but until then, I hope everyone is staying safe and healthy!



<https://www.tmcec.com/>



# CENTRAL TEXAS CHAPTER



## Message from the Outgoing Chapter President:

Hello Central TX! I wanted to let you all know how much I've enjoyed the opportunity to serve as your Chapter President these past few years, and I look forward to continuing to stay in touch and help out the Chapter whenever I can! Thank you so much to my Chapter Board, and Committee members for all your hard work and dedication to TCCA— you guys are amazing and definitely keep the wheels turning. \*\*Members - Our incoming Chapter President is Chad Eixmann, Court Administrator with the City of Bryan! Chad is currently the Central TX Vice President, and has served on several committees over the years. Our Chapter is in good hands!

- April Christiansen, Cedar Park

## FREE Virtual Education!

Take advantage of the ease of remote learning by attending the Central Texas Chapter's bi-monthly education sessions and Chapter Business Meetings (held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Friday of the month)! On November 13<sup>th</sup>, 31 members from several Chapters attended our virtual training: "Access to Justice: Beyond the Courtroom Walls During a Pandemic," presented by City of Victoria Court Administrator & South Texas Chapter President, Tiffany Totah. It was a fantastic opportunity to learn not only from an amazing presenter, but to also hear from the attendees as well! Our next education session is January 8<sup>th</sup> at noon! Visit [TCCA's Events Calendar](#) for more information!

## Volunteers Needed!

If you are interested in volunteering, PLEASE let us know! We'd love to work with you and could sure use your help! Visit our [Chapter website](#) to see a list of our committees, and to find Board member contact info!

## Greetings to Everyone! FREEDOM TRAIL CHAPTER

If I haven't had the chance to meet you yet, my name is Andrea Goff Fontanes and I am very excited to serve as your President for the Freedom Trail Chapter. To tell you a little about myself, I am the court administrator for the City of Helotes Municipal Court. I have been with the City of Helotes for just a little over nine years now. When I'm not in the office thinking about court items 24/7, I am with my family or outside hiking or kayaking any spare moment I can get. I am married to a police officer, Frank (that makes my life more interesting, depending on how you look at it, lol) and have two girls, Lillianna (12) and Michiko (10).



I love being a court administrator, it is interesting, always changing, and you meet people from all walks of life. I love this profession because of the impact we can have on individuals that walk through the doors of our court. I look forward to meeting you all soon whether it be virtually or in-person (when the time is right and safely of course).

If you ever need anything, have any concerns or may be interested in helping out the Freedom Trail Chapter reach out to me anytime by email: [agoff@helotes-tx.gov](mailto:agoff@helotes-tx.gov) or by phone: 210-695-5902. We are all in this together and it will take us even further when we all work together. Have a safe and happy holiday season and New Year everyone!

Kindest regards,

**Andrea M. Goff Fontanes**

Andrea M. Goff Fontanes, CMCC  
Helotes Municipal Court Administrator

Gulf Coast Chapter



Texas Court Clerks Association

## Gulf Coast Chapter

### Chapter President Chrissy Dahse



On a day when the rain drizzled down, and the sun refused to shine, I found a rainbow inside the walls of the City of League City.

My task for the day was to present awards to clerks of the Gulf Coast Chapter for distinguished service to the Texas Court Clerks Association. What I witnessed happen in League City was simply wonderful. League City is a shining example of a supportive and encouraging work environment. Employees from multiple departments assembled to see a clerk receive her award. Upon my return to my office I felt compelled to inquire what League City does to inspire and promote educational goals. What I learned from Shirley Murphy, Court Administrator, is that the city does not offer monetary incentives for educational

achievements. Instead these clerks thrive off of a competitive, supportive, and encouraging work environment cheering each other on. A true testament to great leadership.

League City's track record boast the following certifications from past to current:

4-Level III

6-Level II

2-Level I

1-in the process of earning their first certification & 2 wrapping up their Certified Court Manager's certification in December.

Congratulations League City in all of your positive efforts to show value to your employees and acknowledging their hard work.

# South Texas Chapter



Hello South Chapter members,

I wanted to take a moment and thank you all for the opportunity to serve as your Chapter President.

2020 is wrapping up and what a year it has been! One of the most exciting things that has occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic is virtual learning opportunities. The South Chapter has 3 upcoming virtual learning opportunities on December 4<sup>th</sup> and 2 prep sessions on December 14<sup>th</sup> and December 15<sup>th</sup>. I feel this is a great benefit for our Chapter to take advantage of as we continue to work on slowing the spread of the COVID virus. You can find virtual learning opportunities around the state through the Texas Court Clerks Association website under the events tab (<https://texascourtclerks.org/events>)

I am looking forward to continuing serving as your Chapter President and look forward to providing more educational opportunities for our South Chapter area. If you are interested in serving on any of the committees, please feel free to reach out to me directly, or register through the website (<https://texascourtclerks.org/Committees/>)

Your board members for 2021-2022 include the following:

- Tiffany Totah, City of Victoria, Chapter President
- Adrienne Dill, City of Corpus Christi, Vice President
- Amanda Ellis, City of Cuero, Secretary
- Elizabeth Montes, City of Victoria Treasurer
- Crystal Vasquez, South Padre Island, Director at Large
- Laura Garza, City of Corpus Christi, Immediate Past President

I can be reached at by phone at (361) 485-3050 or e-mail at [ttotah@victoriatx.gov](mailto:ttotah@victoriatx.gov). I look forward to working with the South Chapter! I hope you all are staying safe and well during this time.

# West Texas Chapter



**We need you!** TCCA is looking for a few members to step up into a Director at Large position or two. These persons will help coordinate education partnerships between West Texas and other TCCA Chapters who are hosting education – mostly virtually. TCCA is committed to providing education to all Municipal and Justice Clerks – statewide! Help be a part of making that happen for West Texas. Only skills and talent needed is a willingness and time to help others.

Interested? Contact Mara Dudley <[mdudley@cityoflano.com](mailto:mdudley@cityoflano.com)>

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[tylertech.com/connectedcourts](http://tylertech.com/connectedcourts).



# The Power of Dignity and Respect

By Edinia Espinoza, City of San Antonio

In my 18 ½ years serving the San Antonio Municipal Court I don't believe I've encountered more than a handful of individuals walking in our door who were happy to see a judge. As court employees, we are tasked with what sometimes seems like insurmountable tasks: assist individuals who are already mad walking in the door, annoyed to have to come to court, who don't want help but are here nonetheless, or who are interacting with us because they were arrested on a warrant. To these individuals who need our help we hold positions which may affect their lives. Municipal courts conduct daily business where consequences are those which may impact an individual's driver's license, employment and eligibility for housing and assistance resources, and income.

I recently had occasion to watch a TED Talk given by Judge Victoria Pratt, Newark Municipal Court Judge (you can find the video link [here](#)). I urge you to take a moment and watch the video. Initially, you may think the presentation is solely meant for judges. I can assure it's not. We have great influence as court personnel and public servants. The video shows how exceptional court services can be a one size fits all attitude and that showing dignity and respect can turnaround a negative interaction into a great one. As I listened to Judge Pratt's presentation, I contemplated what actions I could take immediately and free of charge. Here's what I decided those were:

**1. Respect your authority and your authority will be respected.** It's important that we recognize the court's, and ultimately our, positions of authority, we respect it, stay true to the responsibility that goes with the power we have as court servants, and that we use it all for good. When we respect what is in our power to do to help others, we will receive that respect in return.

**2. Let individuals speak.** Not without regard to ex parte communication, allow individuals to have a voice and fully express why they've come to court, need a payment plan, can't make a payment, etc. A study by Wright State University College of Business found that the average person listens at only about 25% efficiency. This means that for the average person, 75% of them is disengaged from the conversation. When we pay full attention to people speaking about their experiences or thoughts, they will perceive you as someone who cares about their well-being, thus making it easier to effectively communicate with them.

**3. Show dignity to everyone like it's free, because it is.** Up until a person appears to court, you have most likely never met him or her. Showing everyone dignity who stands in front of you, for whatever reason, not only is procedural justice at its best, it's you at your best. Many people walk into courthouses across the nation daily, each one with a different life circumstance. Showing them dignity for the sake of it could have the greatest positive impact you may never know about, and it will cost you nothing.

Sometimes we leave it to the judge to be impartial, maintain decorum, and set the tone for the court. But the judicial canons are clear. In our capacity as court staff, we are an extension of the judiciary and therefore subject to the rules of conduct. We must recognize that each of us is in a position of authority to the public walking in our doors. We can help them have a voice, obtain information about their licenses, or get them the help they need to take care of their legal matter. We are procedural justice ambassadors.

The next time you interact with the public, remember what your voice means to the other person and what their voice should mean to you. Use your authority in such a way that they too feel "love from the bench." (as Judge Pratt would say). We are the face of the court, let us also reflect the heart of it.

# Court Clerk Certifications

Level One		
First Name	Last Name	City
Mary	Butler	Argyle
Cynthia	Jacob	Frisco
Sandra	Santana	Corpus Christi
Aldijana	Sarkic	Garland
Gretchen	Smith	Coppell
Guadalupe	Bueno	Little Elm
Kathleen	Reeh	Jourdanton
Benita	Cortez	Laredo
Laura	Hall	Center
Martha	Martinez	Laredo
Audra	Tadlock	Midland
Courtney	Folsom	La Porte
Raquel	Carrasco	North Richland Hills
Priscilla	Chavez	Midland
Ana	Acuna	Rowlett
La Hoya	Miller	Houston

Level Two		
First Name	Last Name	City
Tiwanna	Brown	Brenham
Francene	Dorton	Waco
Renee	Flores	Woodway
Juan	Garcia	Arlington
Uchechi	Saka	Grand Prairie
Gina	Vega	League City
Deborah	Chase	Denton
Samantha	Maddox	Alvin
Noemi	Olivarez	Midland
Zayda	Wakley	Midland
Preston	Skinner	Wylie

Level Three		
First Name	Last Name	City
Alma	Coronado	Mansfield
Terry	Teri	Sugar Land
Norma	West	Missouri City
Aimee	Roe	League City

Congratulations to everyone for a great achievement!  
 If you are interested in learning about the Certification  
 Program, visit: [www.tmcec.com](http://www.tmcec.com).





# 2020 TCCA AWARDS PRESENTATIONS



2020 Distinguished Service Award  
Eva Angeles  
Luling Municipal Court  
Court Clerk

2020 Distinguished Service Award  
Tiffany Totah  
Victoria Municipal Court  
Municipal Court Administrator





2020 Distinguished Service Award

Mara Dudley

Llano Municipal Court

Clerk of the Court



2020 Distinguished Award

Maribel Hernandez

Richardson Municipal Court

Senior Court Clerk



2020 Distinguished Award

Amy Baldwin

League City Municipal Court

Deputy Court Clerk



2020 Distinguished Award

Kendra Beverly

Sugarland Municipal Court

Municipal Court Administrator



2020 Distinguished Service Award

Sonya Cates

Alvin Municipal Court

Municipal Court Administrator



2020 Distinguished Service Award

April Matthews

Richardson Municipal Court

Deputy Court Clerk



2020 Distinguished Service Award

Courtney Broussard

Woodville Municipal Court

Court Clerk



2020 Distinguished Service Award

Cheryl Price

Sherman Municipal Court

Deputy Court Clerk



2020 Extraordinary Achievement Award

Jeremy Leonard

Desoto Municipal Court  
Manager of Court Services



2020 Excellence Award

Jennifer Bozorgnia

Irving Municipal Court  
Court Services Coordinator



2020 Outstanding Achievement Award

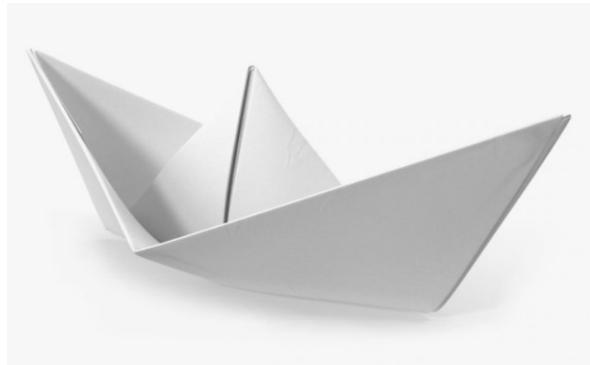
In Education

Lisa Howard

Hurst Municipal Court  
Municipal Court Administrator

**Member -**  
**Sponsor -**  
**Scholar -**  
**Relation -**

**SHIP**



**Its time to get on board the SHIP!**  
**By Kimberly Kierce, TCCA Treasurer**

It is time to set sail on another TCCA MemberSHIP year. Don't let the 2021 MemberSHIP year depart without you. Take the helm and steer your professional development alongside your fellow SHIPmates on your Court Clerk adventure. SponsorSHIPS further promote the mission of TCCA and we even offer ScholarSHIPS to our members. Let TCCA be your compass to stay on course. Your MemberSHIP ultimately leads to meaningful professional RelationSHIPS.

Are you ready to set sail? Embark on your 2021 TCCA Court Clerk journey by [joining or renewing TODAY!](#)

[Need a membership justification letter? Access that here!](#)