

## Meet Medina County Clerk of Courts Kathy Fortney,

by Kate Feeks, Courthouse Reporter for *CZ Court Reporter* at [www.czcourtreporter.com](http://www.czcourtreporter.com)

“Dedicated” “I’ve been dedicated to this job; I’ve given everything I’ve got and then some”. Kathy Fortney, Medina County Clerk of Courts, gives a heartfelt answer to my question of the one word she would use to describe herself. Dedicated is only the beginning of the loyalty and devotion she has for waking up and going to work to serve us – the public.

A Medina Senior High School alumnus, Kathy Fortney has lived in Medina all her life. In 1968 she applied for a job with the Medina County Clerk of Courts, got an interview and was offered the job. “I literally went in with the first brick here” Kathy says with a big laugh, after explaining she was moved into the new courthouse 15 days after she started working. Each day forward has been a welcoming challenge in her life that has made her just the person she is today.

Kathy, as an officer of the Medina County Court system, along with her extremely supportive staff, are responsible for maintaining court records with the utmost respect and security. “This is a huge responsibility; these are people’s lives I’m dealing with”. These court records include civil, criminal felony, and domestic relation cases. The Clerk of Courts also issue subpoenas, jury summons, warrants to arrest, automobile and watercraft title processing, collecting revenue related to court costs, bonds, fines and foreclosure transactions. The Clerk's office also handles records notary commissions issued to Medina County residents by the State of Ohio and records naturalization records.

By state law, Kathy is also a member of the Medina County Data Processing Board, the Medina County Records Commission, and the Medina County Microfilm Board. The function of the clerk’s office can seem unending but to Kathy, “It’s exciting, there is never any down time ever – that’s why I’ve been here for so long”. “My job is to assist the public and I love it”.

Because under Ohio Law, the Clerk of Courts is responsible for issuing motor vehicle titles, Kathy is in charge of offices not just at the Medina County

Courthouse, but also in Wadsworth, Brunswick, and Medina. The Clerk's office in the Medina County Courthouse is in charge of court documents, while the offices in the cities are responsible for issuing motor vehicle titles. Although Kathy's office is commonly referred to as the Medina County Clerk of Courts, it's formally called the Medina County Clerk of the Court of Common Pleas. Its jurisdiction includes both the General Division and the Domestic Relations Division, but not the Probate or Juvenile Courts.

Under Ohio law, Probate and Juvenile Court Judges are their own clerks. This means that the files in cases assigned to Judge Christopher J. Collier, Judge James L. Kimbler, or Judge Mary R. Kovack are handled by Kathy's office, but the files in cases assigned to Judge John Lohn, who is both the Medina County Juvenile and Probate Judges are handled by Judge Lohn's staff.

Because the population of Medina County keeps expanding, the work of the Medina County Clerk of Courts also keeps expanding. This can be seen from the increase in the number of cases that the Medina County Common Pleas Court handles. In 2000, for example, according to the Ohio Supreme Court, the new filings in the Medina County Clerk of Courts office for the General Division and the Domestic Relations Division totaled 4286. By 2008, this figure had grown to 7351 new filings.

Kathy is an advocate of making sure the public has access to their needs around the clock. The imaging system is a website that was created so that people can retrieve files or information they need without leaving their homes. "It is a time and money saver" Kathy explains. It has been a beneficial tool from helping family members research family history to the FBI researching an individual's background.

When asked about Kathy and her office, Judge James Kimbler said, "Kathy and her office do a great job for the people of Medina County. As a judge, I find it very easy to work with her and her staff. She handles her job with grace and dignity. The judges in this courthouse are lucky to have her as Clerk."

Forty two years. That's how long Kathy has been serving the public. She believes some of her biggest accomplishments in life are first, being a

mother to her son and being elected to serve this county and its residents. Kathy appreciates the trust that the voters in Medina County have placed in her and her staff. As she puts it, "It has been an honor to be in this seat."

Kathy and her staff treat each and every person that walks through the courts with sincere understanding and respect. She makes a point to keep in mind many are intimidated and unaware of how the court system functions. Each person's needs and wants are met and if not, Kathy explains "we keep going over their information until they have a full understanding of what is needed of them".

It's no wonder that Kathy Fortney has maintained this position for so many years. Kathy's dedication and welcoming manner for anyone that has passed through these courts has brought the public a perspective of their importance in the Medina County justice system.