

E-filing welcomed in Dallas County

Online court system saves time, improves record keeping

By TERRI LANGFORD / Staff Writer

For law firms, the mad afternoon dash to the courthouse may soon be a thing of the past.

On Wednesday, Hughes & Luce lawyers Paul Genender and Stacie Tandy watched as paralegal Debbie Reese filed a court document from of all places the main lobby of Dallas Love Field airport.

"Pretty easy," Ms. Reese said after she sent a probate court document sailing over a secured Internet portal operated by Case File Xpress to the Dallas County Clerk's Office.

The extra \$10.14 cost of electronic court filing saved her about a half-hour's worth of work prepping such a document for a courier service to deliver to the courthouse. In turn, the cost of parking for herself or a courier, her time and the cost of writing a check saved the law firm at least \$80 for the transaction.

The Dallas County clerk's office is the first in North Texas to bring electronic filing, e-filing, to its court system. The clerk's office oversees five county courts-at-law and three probate courts. E-filing is expected to be available in the state district court system in Dallas County by early 2005.

Only four other counties in Texas offer e-filing: Upton, near Midland; El Paso; Bexar; and Fort Bend, near Houston.

"It will be phenomenal ... especially in county courts where the cutoff to file is 4:30," Mr. Genender said. "It will save in other costs to get somebody to run to the courthouse. In lawyer time, in courier time."

E-filing is slowly making its way through the state's county and state district court systems in Texas.

The mission is to make the filing process easier, the record-keeping more efficient and eventually place public documents on the Web for public access, officials said.

"This is that first step to getting all state filings up online," said Dallas County Clerk Cynthia Figueroa Calhoun as she watched representatives from CaseFile Xpress guide the Hughes & Luce team through their secured service.

Dallas County taxpayers may like e-filing for another reason. It costs them nothing to set up and brings \$2 a transaction to county coffers to finance training for court staff and to cover all start-up costs.

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