



The Register's Report

AS A TAXPAYER YOUR BUSINESS IS OUR BUSINESS



Dana Rone
Essex County Register

ECRO STRIVING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

The Essex County Register Dana Rone and her team have worked hard to make a positive impact on reducing the hardship of homelessness in Essex County. Last year, the ECRO raised over \$69,000 for the Homeless Trust Fund, collected and distributed coats throughout Essex County with a commitment to do more in 2016.

As of August 31, 2016, \$129,967.00 has been raised for the Homeless Trust Fund. Based on the current trends in the ECRO, the collection for the fund will double the 2015 amount. Allison Fenty, Clerk 3 stated "that she loved that Register Rone came to the office with a commitment to establish the Homelessness Trust Fund and to host a coat drive for the community."

According to Register Rone, "This is one of several examples of public servants in my office making a positive and rewarding impact in the community."

Kudos to the ECRO staff for their commitment to the residents of Essex County.

TECHNOLOGY USED TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE, PRESERVE DOCUMENTS AND TO ENGAGE THE PUBLIC

Since January 2015, the Essex County Register's Office (ECRO) has continued to review the operation to identify areas for the implementation of *continuous improvement*, a concept developed by Dr. Edward Deming, an American engineer. Register Rone's use of technology in revamping the ECRO would lead any first year public administration student to believe that she has studied all 14 points of continuous improvement directly under the late Dr. Deming.

Register Dana Rone said that she observed that the books in the vault that were dated prior to 1967 were originals with no copies. This observation led to her team's commitment to include preserving these books as a 2017 upgrade project. "The law mandates that the ECRO archive permanent records in perpetuity," says Dana Rone. "Therefore, the ECRO is beginning a project that is anticipated to take 7 years to ensure that the public has continual access to their records as the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) requires."

As the ECRO transitions from an original copy world (Book & Page system) to a digital world, they will begin an ambitious undertaking that will require the office to spend more money but at no cost to Essex County taxpayers because the filing fees cover the costs for most upgrades. Each upgrade initiative is offset by the revenue brought by the upgrade. For example, there have been upgrades to the copiers, vault, and computer systems and these upgrades have produced funds which have offset the costs of the upgrade. This is good management and an effective use of taxpayer dollars.

The Return on Investment (ROI) has reduced costs, improved performance and engaged the public through well thought out, innovative ideas that have been lauded by staff, and public users of the ECRO near and far as evidenced in an e-mail to the office dated August 4, 2016 with the subject line—Excellent Customer Service. The e-mail reads, "Ms. Rone, I had the immense pleasure of interacting with your team in the Office of Deeds and Mortgages yesterday and today. I am in the state of Georgia now and it is difficult to transact business for my parents while not being there so it was a Godsend to be able to depend on your team to help me accomplish this most important undertaking."

Register Rone's response to the acknowledgement was simply, "This office serves 22 municipalities and it is highly important that we set a high standard of efficiency since fraud is a fast growing crime in our country. To address this concern and to protect the public's most valuable asset we are dedicated to providing Essex County taxpayers with the best service possible. Please visit us, I assure you a great experience."

Did You Know?

Customer Service Training – Lauded by the Public

Have you ever dreaded going to a public space because you knew that the experience was going to be one that you will regret? Well, that's exactly what some residents of Essex County, New Jersey used to say about their visits to the Essex County Register's Office and other municipalities. **Diane Whitt, Sharon T. Jones and Patricia MacDonald** are a few of the users of the office who have expressed that they are pleased with their experiences in the Essex County Register's Office. This is a confirmation that the investment that Register Rone has made in public service training during her tenure has produced a *Return on Investment (ROI)*.

The Essex County Register's Office has been flooded with letters and telephone calls from the public about excellent customer service that is received in person and via telephone.

Since 2015 Dana Rone, the Essex County Register, took the reins, she knew that she wanted to change the culture of the office. She knew that she wanted to provide an accurate and efficient service to the residents of Essex County. She also knew that such lofty goals would require a team. The ECRO's leadership team developed strategies and training workshops that are producing results. *The Customer Service Training Series* and the ECRO's "Road Show," has produced a flood of accolades for the Register and her staff. One note received June 2016 read, "When I read the article on how you were going out into the community to address concerns surrounding the theft of deeds, I immediately thought of your Dad. That is what he represented, concern for the people. Thank God, you have followed his path! Diane Whitt, Urban Elder.

Another described her experience this way, "Kristin took the time to call my office and let me know what was needed...She was personable, knowledgeable and an absolute pleasure to work with...This was just so nice to experience. A big thanks again to Kristin!"

A user of the office wrote, "I am writing to compliment the proactive, supportive and upbeat assistance of Shikena Harper."

A West Orange resident via the County Executive's office wrote, "Sharon Doers in Quality Control helped me with the paper work I needed. It was all very overwhelming to me.... I could not have managed my way through the process without her help. She explained the process to me and said she would be happy to help me with the final details when I return with the new paperwork."

Finally, an e-mail received in the office in June said it all, "Good Afternoon, yesterday afternoon I came to the Register of Deeds and Mortgages Office to look at my property deed. I just want to say how friendly and helpful everyone in the office was to me."

The staff of the ECRO have set a tone and a high standard of service that is being lauded across the county, state, and country. This is truly a Return on Investment that should be modeled around the country.

Hats off to the Register's Office.



ESSEX COUNTY REGISTER'S OFFICE BUILDING TOURS & ROAD SHOWS A HUGE SUCCESS!



What do Ann Shephard, Fannie Harrison, Gertrude "Trudy" Hendrix and Ruth Ashby have in common? They are all excited about the services that they received from Dana Rone, Essex County Register and her staff at the Register's Office (ECRO).

On July 11, 2016, Essex County Register Dana Rone, and her staff invited East Orange seniors for a tour of the office. Richard Clark, Recreation Supervisor, led a delegation that was "well-received" according to the seniors that were interviewed.

Gertrude "Trudy" Hendrix quickly confessed that "I missed that tour because I was late, but I heard her (Dana Rone) personally when she came here to the center to do a workshop [June 16, 2016]." This sentiment expressed by Ms. Hendrix set the tone for the interview.

Ruth Ashby shouted, "I was on that tour. I was excited. It was excellent." I was telling people, "you should have been there!"

Fannie Harrison echoed Trudy with, "It was excellent!" She went on to express that she learned that "when your spouse has passed and their name is on the deed, you should take them off of the deed and add another trusted relative." She explained that everyone in the ECRO was courteous and they saved her a whole lot of time.

Ann Shephard explained that the "tour was good and very informative." I asked her what specifically was good and she happily replied, "the presentation about the deeds was good, the staff was very family-like and very nice!"

The Essex County Register has repeatedly assured Essex County residents that she and her staff are committed to providing service with a smile. Ms. Rone's commitment to educating the public was repeated by many of the seniors. Her comments said it all, "I highly recommend that you come to our offices to meet me and my staff so that we can help you reduce the chances of becoming a victim of property or mortgage fraud. Your home is your biggest investment. Please take the necessary steps to protect it."

At the conclusion of the interview Ann, Fannie and Trudy agreed with Ruth that their ECRO tour staff "treated us seniors excellently!"

Public Service Highlights



Allison Fenty, Clerk 3
Hired August 27, 1987 – 29 years of service

What has training been like for you these last couple of years versus in the beginning of your career?

Ms. Rone has upgraded our system. It's more advanced. In the years that I have been here, I have seen such an improvement. We were backlogged between 3-6 months in recording documents. Now it is within 48 hours, so you can see the difference. She has made a great improvement within the system.

The thing that I love about her is that we had the coat drive for the Homeless Trust Fund. We brought in over \$60,000. I think that we are doing great. She's doing a fabulous job. It's great! She is doing a great job. An excellent job!

Based on your nearly 3 decades of experience what do you think made the difference in terms of Dana Rone doing this job?

Her personality. She is a person who does what she says. She doesn't mince words. She is very professional. I think that it probably has to do with her experiences that she had before bringing her experience in. She taught us customer service training, she made advances in the computers to make our jobs much easier, and changes to the office. She remodeled the offices to create better working conditions.

Your final thoughts...

Keep up the great job Ms. Rone! We love you.

William Merten, *Book Binding Specialist, 30 years of Service*

"These last couple of years have been the best part of my 30 years. I see this office moving forward when I really didn't think that I would ever see that," says William Merten, a bookbinding specialist who was hired at the Essex County Register's Office on February 24, 1986.

How has the new training by Register Rone enhanced what you do?

Bill: It makes you more aware of documents that you have been working with for a long time that you might not have been aware of. What are the stipulations, how do they need to be recorded, what are the rules for the different documents and actually what the different documents are. We have many employees who diligently learned and sought out that information on their own. Over the course of years, I got a lot of my knowledge, actually from asking title searchers questions because they are here every day.

Is the training working?

Bill: Definitely working because we have employees who have been here for a long time who are just learning things that are helpful to them, that maybe they weren't aware of in the past. Or, it helps you to catch a mistake. If you catch a mistake before it goes on (for public view), you eliminate a mistake and possible litigation.



Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver Sponsors Assembly Bill A3828 – Property Owners Protection Act

Did
You
Know?



Assemblywoman Sheila Oliver,
Dist. 34

In a recent visit with Essex County Register Dana Rone, she brought to my attention that there are loopholes in our current State statutes in terms of recording deeds and transferring property. Ironically, she was in the office one day and someone came in her office to transfer a deed maintaining that they were a family member. She knew the family and knew that the individual had no relationship to the family. So she stopped the transaction.

What the public should know is that the current Statute has no requirements for identification when transferring property. Registers of Deeds and Mortgages are not permitted by law to police documents. You walk a fine line on following the NJ statute and protecting taxpayer's property, especially when they knowingly come in contact with fraudulent transactions. Much too often our senior population become prey to unscrupulous scammers. ECRO's staff has received training to identify fraud and to immediately notify the Financial Crimes Division, of the Essex County Prosecutor's Office.

The Star Ledger wrote an informative news article ("How people can secretly steal your property in New Jersey", May 27, 2016). An individual that filed a fraudulent deed on a church property claiming to be the owner. It is time that we amend past laws and make adjustments to reflect the current needs of the people. I have talked with Registers and County Clerks in other vicinages and there is no doubt that we need to tighten that up.

Subsequently, I have drafted legislation to update the statute. Currently, the law does not require the Registers of Deeds and Mortgages to notify the owner of record that there has been a transaction on their property. The new legislation "Property Owners Protection Act" would mandate that ECRO notify the owner of record that a transaction has occurred. Although this seems to be a minor change to the current law, it will prevent and deter transactions and give the owner of record immediate notice of a fraudulent transaction.

I believe that through this process the Register and I have learned that "Each one, Teach one" is a valuable motto to follow which has allowed us together to meet current needs of today's taxpayers.

I am very glad that Register Rone brought that to my attention. I am very happy that she is traveling around the County talking to audiences of older adults who are property owners informing them what they have to do to protect their most important assets.

DANA RONE PUZZLE CHOICE

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WORD LIST:

ASSIGNMENTS
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 CUSTOMER SERVICE
 DANA RONE
 DEED
 ERECORD
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FORECLOSURE
 FRAUD
 HOMELESSNESS TRUST FUND
 LIENS
 MORTGAGE
 OPRA
 QUALITY CONTROL
 RECORDING
 RESPECT

RETURN ON INVESTMENT
 ROAD SHOW
 TAXPAYERS
 TEAMWORK
 TECHNOLOGY
 VAULT
 WELLNESS

Essex County Register's Office Provides e-Record Training for Municipalities

The ECRO has hit the ground running for the summer months. e-Recording Training has been completed for Bloomfield, Newark, Irvington, Orange, South Orange and East Orange, in an effort to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the ECRO and the municipalities that it serves. According to Register Dana Rone, "e-Recording is an advanced way of recording real property documents." The ECRO's goal is to provide the most accurate and efficient recordings of real property transactions.



Did
You
Know?

Essex County is the second highest populated county in NJ.

Essex County Register's Office is Recording on time according to New Jersey State Statute. (48 hrs. Mandate)

Essex County has the largest number of homeless people, 19.9% of the statewide population. (NJ.com)

There is an increase of individuals living on the street. The number rose by 48% since 2015. (NJ.com)

NJ's Unclaimed Property Administration has nearly \$264 million for 2015 in unclaimed assets. Go to www.missingmoney.com search your name. (NJ.com)

There is a rise in fraudulent property transfers. Check your Deed!

CONTACT US:

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