

Verdict: Vetick exemplary district court clerk

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COLUMBUS — Marlene Vetick knows about keeping the records straight in her workplace.

The longtime Platte County District Court clerk has been at it for more than 30 years, starting her career in 1984 as a filing clerk in the office now located on the second floor of the county courthouse at 2610 14th St.

“I worked my way up,” joked Vetick, who will turn 56 in a week.

Vetick was recently presented the Marjorie Schaffer Memorial Award by Nebraska Chief Justice Mike Heavican as the outstanding clerk of the district court in the state at the judicial branch’s annual employee recognition awards at the state Capitol.

The judicial branch’s employee recognition committee chose nine employees and one team to honor from candidates whose names were submitted by their peers in the courts and probation offices where they work.

The purpose of the program is to recognize ongoing court and probation employee dedication, acknowledge exemplary contributions and encourage employee commitment.

“I was very surprised (with the award) ... you have no idea you’re even being considered by the committee,” Vetick said. “It’s quite an honor.”

Each county in the state district court has a clerk performing administrative duties. State law requires counties with populations above 7,000 to have a district court clerk elected by the voters.

There are 63 full-time clerks among the state’s 93 counties. If the position doesn’t exist in a county, the county clerk is the ex officio clerk of the district court.

Vetick, a Columbus native, has seen her fair share of changes, from swelling criminal caseloads and lawsuit filings to recording child support payments written by hand into large, bound ledgers and the voluminous growth in electronic information sharing.

The local court office and others around the state gave up record-keeping on child support payments in the early 2000s, said Vetick, who was first elected to hold the clerk’s office in November 1990.

Those payments are now sent to the Nebraska Child Support Payment Center, she said.

Meanwhile, the court office’s adult caseload of criminal and domestic cases (divorces, protection orders, civil lawsuits) have been on a steady incline.

The court's 2014-15 caseload, recorded from July 1 to June 30, stood at 611 cases. That figure climbed to 645 in 2015-16 and 703 in 2016-17.

"The office's caseload and the number of documents filed have really bloomed," Vetick said.

People don't realize the number of filings that can be involved as a case progresses from start to finish, she said.

Depending on the gravity of a case, Vetick said, a file can have from as few as 20 documents to around 300 pages.

All of the duties of the district clerk's office — maintaining files and records of actions taken in the court — are required by state law.

Felony criminal cases, mental health petitions, harassment and domestic abuse protection order applications, juror summons for district and county court trials and passport applications are all recorded in the office.

Accepting passport applications, which are granted by the U.S. Department of State within six weeks in most cases, is voluntary for the local office, Vetick said.

"I look at accepting passport applications as good for county revenues and the convenience of local travelers," she said.

Vetick hopes to be sticking around for a while at the office. Her current four-year term — her sixth overall — will expire at the end of 2018.

"I want to stay as long as I can do a good job and the voters want me in the office," Vetick said. "I've got a few more years left."

She and her husband, Joe, have two grown sons, Shane and Eric.