

State courts working on electronic access system

Federal Case.Net is wonderful

In May I wrote about changes that were likely coming to Case.Net that could affect what information you can access online regarding court cases. I'm back to report this is just the tip of an iceberg!

In the last few months representatives from OSCA (Office of State Courts Administrator) have been meeting with bar groups to talk about changes coming soon in how lawyers file pleadings.

OSCA is going to begin converting the court file system and the documents filed by lawyers from paper to electronic files.

This change is expected to start in early 2011. All of you who have worked with the federal court PACER system know how wonderful it is to be able to access court pleadings without having to travel to a federal courthouse. Eventually — but not immediately — you'll have that convenience for state court filings.

I went to a meeting about the system a few weeks ago and can tell you that it apparently will roll out in St. Charles County. St. Charles is the site of the first Capitol of our state. A judge there is on the planning commission.

It looks like there's going to be a push to make Jackson County (Kansas City) a second-tier site, which means I'll be able to report on how effective the system is at some point in the near future.

I'm a big fan of the federal court system, so I'm excited to hear our state court system is finally going to be moving in that direction.

But one drawback is that this is not going to be available to the public (and the media) at first. There will not

be paper files for those cases that are electronic, and therefore if you need to look at the file, you'll have to go to the courthouse, where you'll be given access to a computer to see the electronic file.

There will be several levels of "security" in the system, allowing certain documents that need to be filed under seal to be protected from public access.

Never forgetting that I represent your interests, I was quick at the meeting I attended to ask about when public access would be granted. The first response was not overwhelmingly positive, but clearly those responsible for this roll-out are primarily focused on making the rollout happen statewide and avoiding glitches in the system.

After some pushing, I did secure a commitment that they would work to grant public access to this once the system is up and running well.

So it won't come immediately, but those who are responsible for the planning do realize that eventually this must be made available to the public and they are committed to making that happen.



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Russian editor visits Osceola paper

Russian journalist Diana Kachalova, in town for a family memorial service, visited the office of the *St. Clair County Courier* in Osceola on May 10.

Kachalova is the editor of a Norwegian-owned cluster of 14 neighborhood newspapers published weekly in St. Petersburg, Russia. The papers have a combined circulation of 450,000.

Kachalova and her husband, Robert

I look forward to that day!

Meanwhile, the way we can push this along is to constantly look for ways to reinforce to our Missouri court system how important Case.Net is to reporters. Everyone is busy doing their jobs — reporters, court clerks, courtroom staff, even the lawyers in the courthouse.

Good reporters appear at the courthouse regularly and do their own "pounding the pavement" rather than expecting a story to come to them. But sometimes in the course of writing a story, it is important to be able to double-check facts or access a record you didn't think to look at when at the courthouse.

Case.Net is an invaluable tool to all of us for that purpose — for me in checking the status of cases where I am peripherally involved in far-away counties, to double-checking the date of the next court appearance when I didn't write it down while standing in the courtroom.

Case.Net saves me dozens of calls to the clerks in the courthouse, thus I avoid interrupting their day and distracting them from the important work they have on their desk.

I'm sure every reporter in the state uses Case.Net on occasion — from the courthouse and city hall reporter to the sports reporter to the obit writer commenting on a lawyer's past activities. We need to constantly remind courthouse personnel how important that electronic access is to us, and to the public at large.

It is a benefit to all of us provided at the expense of those who use the court system in our state, and it is important to make sure we reiterate to the system how much we appreciate its presence.

Palomo, were in Osceola with 10 other out-of-town family members for the burial of the ashes of Palomo's parents. His mother was a sister of a local resident.

Kachalova's comment on the local publishing scene: "My favorite is the "Buyer's Guide," because I like to see what's for sale."