

## FOCUS ON

### Our Recorder's Court: An efficient, high-volume court of law

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Courtroom scenes on TV often include dramatic testimony, slick actors, and scandalous plot lines. You may have guessed, perhaps from being called for jury duty, that real life courts really don't work that way. While the courtrooms of Gwinnett County's Recorder's Court may not play host to any Hollywood-worthy performances, the court does perform a vital function within our community. Do you ever wonder what happens

after a law enforcement officer writes a citation? What about the outcome of that visit by a County code enforcement officer to a local business or residence? These are just a couple of examples of the types of issues this court handles.



*Recorder's Court Judges hear anywhere from 150 to 200 cases each day when court is in session.*

Recorder's Court professionals are responsible for handling all traffic citations issued by the Gwinnett County Police, Sheriff, the Georgia Department of Driver Services, and the Georgia Department of Transportation. In a county this big, the workload can be staggering. Just think about how many tickets are issued on our busy roadways on a daily basis. Despite a seemingly endless supply of cases, the court operates in a fast-paced and efficient manner. Three judges, Chief Judge **Michael Greene**, Judge **Patricia Muise**, and Judge **Rodney S. Harris**, hear long lists of cases throughout the week. In addition to traffic and code citations, the court hears animal control, DUI, drug possession, and expired license cases.

The Recorder's Court does a lot more than merely hearing cases and penalizing law breakers. While the courtrooms cycle through anywhere between 150 to 200 cases each per day, the Recorder's Court Clerk's Office is also a hive of activity. Individuals appearing in court are escorted to the clerk's office by a bailiff if they are required to pay, fill out additional paperwork, or meet with a probation officer. Clerk's office staff is responsible for managing all of the paperwork that goes along with court cases and collecting associated fees. Money collected by the court ultimately ends up going to the County's general fund after certain fees and other deductions are taken. In 2014 alone, the Recorder's Court submitted more than \$11 million to the general fund.



*Inside one of the holding cells that adjoin the courtrooms inside Gwinnett County Recorder's Court*

Although no one on staff gives legal advice, Recorder's Court judges do help people in court who are unclear about the law. For example, judges explain the difference between certain pleas so that the person appearing before them can make an informed decision. "We are a user-friendly court," says **Jackie Hammond**, Judge Michael Greene's judicial assistant. "The court does not give legal advice, but it does provide general information and options to the defendants, which they can then use in deciding how to proceed in their case."

The clerk's office also is very customer service oriented. In 2013, the office piloted new computer software that substantially cut the workload and made information available to staff at the push of a button. Implementation of the software eliminated many of the hard copy records and decreased the risk of lost documents. The change has

been so effective that municipalities from other parts of metro Atlanta, Texas, California, and Washington are in the process of adopting the same software. Even though staff has embraced new technology, the focus is still on making things easier for those who visit the court. "We even have volunteers who wait for defendants to arrive in court and help them find their courtroom," said **Karla White**, office manager of the Recorder's Court Clerk's Office. "People no longer have to come in and try to find where they need to be by looking at a video screen."

To find out more about the Gwinnett County Recorder's Court, visit the website at [www.gwinnettcourts.com/recorders](http://www.gwinnettcourts.com/recorders).