

Candidate Answers for the Rock County Clerk of Circuit Courts

Chelo Dassow

1. What specific experience, skills or qualities make you an effective clerk of the circuit court?

My professional career has refined me as a person and set me apart from my peers. I know what it means to manage people and this role is ultimately about managing people. The Army taught me how to be a leader as a Non-Commissioned Officer; as well as how to work as a team to accomplish goals. It has also taught me to how to work with people of many diversities. While working as a Correctional Officer has taught me how to deal with sometimes difficult people and I have learned valuable communication skills to overcome those difficult situations. As both a Soldier and Correctional Officer, I had to learn to adapt to changing situations. This experience will serve me well as the courts are attempting to adjust to rapidly changing technologies. I am naturally inquisitive and as a current Deputy Clerk I have seized opportunities to learn about the various aspects of the job.

2. If elected, what would your top three priorities be?

My first priority if elected will be to implement a training program to cross-train our clerks so that each clerk is familiar with how the other divisions work. Under our current system, each division works independently of the others. If a member of the public wants to file a motion in a family case and pay their traffic ticket, that person will need to see two different clerks. By cross-training every clerk to handle all of the paperwork, the office will more efficiently serve the public. Secondly, I would like to make more of the standard CCAP (Consolidated Court Automation Programs, Wisconsin Circuit Court Access) forms available to the public. We send people away all the time because we don't have the forms they need and think we have. Thirdly, I would like to work with other Clerk of Courts and WI CCAP to improve the way the public can access their own files and be able to get copies they want in an easier, less time consuming way than it currently is.

3. Do you propose any changes in the way the office would be run? If so, what are they?

In addition to the changes suggested in the second question, I propose the office be run with communication. I believe most problems within an office comes from lack of communication. You can't expect something out of your team when they might not have a clue what is going on in the first place. I would also like to set a clear guideline of what is expected of them and to let them all know what to expect from myself as a leader as well. You need to lead by example and that's precisely what I plan to do.

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Jacki Gackstatter

1. What specific experience, skills or qualities make you an effective clerk of the circuit court?

I have almost 4 years of experience as your elected Clerk of Circuit Court. I have a total of 15 years in the Clerk of Circuit Court Office and 24 years as County employee. I am an active member of the Wisconsin Clerk of Circuit Courts Association and a member of the Executive Board for the Association.

I have attended manager training seminars and continuing education offered by Rock County and the Clerk of Courts Association. My training, maturity and experience has taught me how to de-escalate confrontational situations and avoid the need to call for law enforcement. There is no substitute for patience, listening and situational awareness. Those skills are often put to the test with members of the public whose anger and emotions are elevated by the legal matters that bring them into the courts.

I view myself as coach rather than a boss. I lead by example and no job in the office is beneath me. I will step in where needed to maintain a working office. The practical experience gives me a leg-up when it comes to cross training staff.

I have attended Diversity & Inclusion Trainings to gain a better understanding of our work place and the role each of us plays. The trainings have also aided me in hiring, training new staff, improving the workplace culture and serving the public.

2. If elected, what would your top three priorities be?

If re-elected my number one priority is to complete the transition from paper files to electronic files. I commenced the transition from paper files to electronic files in Rock County two years ago. It is scheduled to be complete by the end of 2019. I will use new technology and update processes to continue to create efficiencies that save tax payor dollars. I reduced staffing levels through attrition and made it easier for the public to file papers and have access to Court records.

My next priority is to continue my work to improve the public's experience with my office and to insure the safety of the public, court officers and my staff. Court matters often cause duress and emotional strain. I will continue to train my staff to de-escalate situations that have potential to become confrontational.

My third priority would be to maintain the good working relationships that I have established since I took office. Those relationships include the Judges, DA's Office, Sheriff's Office, County Administration, Child Support, Mediation, and the State Public Defender's Office. I took office in 2015 and since then, three of the seven judges who were sitting on the bench have retired and another was elected to the Court of Appeals. A fourth judge will be retiring in August of this year and his appointed replacement will be sworn in in September. That's a big change and developing good working relationships with the new judges is vital to serving the residents of Rock County.

3. Do you propose any changes in the way the office would be run? If so, what are they?

Recently, I made the change from three divisions within my office to two divisions. The change offers more opportunity for cross training of staff within the office. The cross training will further increase the efficiency of the office. Due to the implementation of electronic filing, job positions are currently evolving to include new job duties while eliminating former job duties. As electronic filing evolves more changes will come. It's my job to insure staff evolve with these changes. With continued training, I have confidence in my staff to meet these new challenges.