Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Cooperative Authority
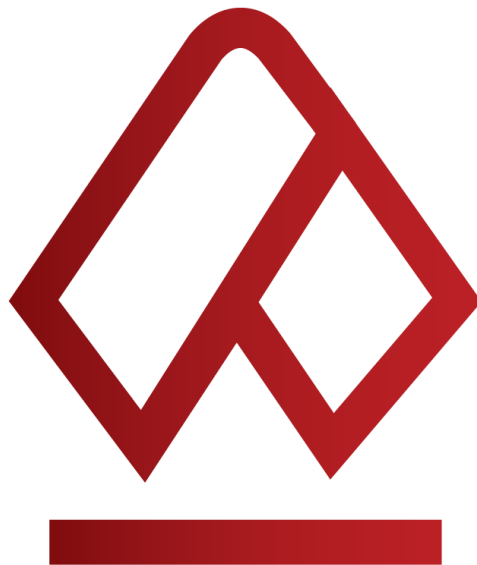
2019-2020 Accomplishments & Year-end Report

*"There is only one way to survive and thrive when faced
with circumstances out of our control … ADAPT."*
―*Charles F. Glassman, MD*

The Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Cooperative Authority, in concert with Georgia's Superior Court clerks, has been adapting since opening its doors 25 years ago—often initiated by our own innovation and critical goal of ushering clerks into the technology-driven 21st century. Sometimes, however, adapting to change is necessary due to circumstances out of our control—like addressing the challenges brought about by a global pandemic and the ensuing shelter-in-place orders.

When COVID-19 erupted earlier this year, the world was forced to adapt, as the virus—in an unprecedented manner and practically overnight—changed the way we operate. It was no longer business-as-usual and many approaches to serving customers and collaborating with colleagues—or just getting anything done—had to change.

Always mindful of its critical role of supporting Superior Court clerks in the operation of their offices—it has been, and always will be, our number-one priority—the Authority understood the pandemic's impact on clerks' office operations and how the unprecedented situation dramatically altered how clerks were able to serve the public. With an all-hands-on-deck approach, the Authority committed to a single mission of helping clerks and their staff continue to meet the public's needs during the current state of emergency. While the Authority was also forced to alter its normal office operations during the pandemic, the goal throughout was to provide a seamless level of service to Superior Court clerks and all others that we serve.

Through flexibility, ingenuity, tireless efforts and a thoughtful approach on how best to help our counties and to continue offering much-needed services, the following are a few of the actions quickly taken to respond to the extraordinary and unprecedented situation:

➢ Provided **work-from-home capabilities** to clerks, their staff, and the Authority team by deploying phones, wireless adapters, laptops, desktops, and VPN software to accommodate shelter-in-place orders. Over 100 VPN accounts were created for clerks and their staff in the weeks following the COVID-19 outbreak.

➢ Offered clerks the option of providing **promo codes** to their constituents to allow temporary, free access to the Authority's statewide search site, www.gsccca.org. In light of the COVID-19 state of emergency causing the closing of clerk offices to walk-in traffic, the promo codes were an effort to help clerks bridge the gap for their search-site customers who normally access the search terminals available in all Superior Court clerk offices. To continue supporting clerks in their effort

to meet the expectations of their constituents, the Authority has extended the deadline for offering promo codes as Georgia's Statewide Judicial Emergency was extended. The promo code offer was met with tremendous response by clerks and, as of June 30, over 1,100 promo codes have been issued.

➢ Handled an **increase in support needs** from counties and website customers as everyone adjusted to the changes and challenges brought about by the pandemic. The Helpdesk staff, along with other members of the Authority team, fielded questions and fixed a myriad of problems to help counties and customers navigate the "new normal." Many issues involved the eFile Project as COVID-19 brought about a tremendous increase in usage. The increased participation in electronic filing has been one of the few silver linings of the pandemic, and the Authority staff has been right there ready to walk clerks through the set-up, help new filers understand the system, and work out any other kinks that popped up.

➢ Assisted counties with training on the Authority's **Notary Online Mail-In Renewal (MIR) program**. This program allows a notary who holds an active commission to mail-in their renewal application, pay with a credit card, thus foregoing a trip to the clerk's office. This feature became even more important when clerks' offices were forced to close. Since the Governor's State of Emergency took effect on March 14, 2020, 28 additional counties have signed up and been trained on this program.

➢ Responded to the increased need for remote learning due to social distancing requirements by adding **two new online classes** for a total of seven, along with adding **14 additional webinars** to the training calendar. The "Notary Online – Mail-in Renewals" course was developed quickly and added in direct response to the COVID-19 crisis. However, the "GSCCCA Indexing Standards – Common Mistakes" online course had been in the works for the past year in response to one of the priority initiatives—to improve current indexing data quality—set by the Authority Board during their 2019 strategic planning session. To this end, the new course was an opportunity to provide clerks with convenient access to areas where the most common mistakes occur, but was completed and published in the spring to increase the remote training available to clerks and their staff allowing them to continue receiving training while working from home.

➢ Provided **drop box service** for apostille and authentication requests. Due to the public health concern regarding COVID-19, the Authority suspended all walk-in service effective March 17, 2020. In an effort to provide an additional option to the public, besides its mail-in service, the Authority quickly created a drop box service that would allow people (or couriers) to place their documents in a drop box located just outside the Authority's suite. Notary & Authentications staff then process and mail the documents back, often with a turn-around time of only one day. Additionally, the Authority incorporated a "compassionate service" option providing immediate turn-around for those under severe time constraints. This option allows a customer to call from their car when the documents have been placed in the drop box; staff immediately picks up and authenticates the documents while the customer waits outside. There have been many compelling stories to support the request for compassionate service. The first request came from a woman who was trying to get to Costa Rica to care for her ailing father before the country closed its borders the next day. With the Authority's help, she ended up on the last flight with her apostille in tow. Another compelling story involved the ex-president of Honduras, Rafael Callejas, who died in

Atlanta on April 4. A funeral home called with a need for an apostille as Honduras had a plane landing at Hartsfield-Jackson airport in a few hours, and the Authority was able to provide immediate service.

The Authority's actions—including its response to the pandemic—are always fueled by its core commitments: a constant drive to anticipate and meet the needs of Superior Court clerks and its other constituencies, a desire to constantly improve its products, and a commitment to provide unmatched customer service across the board. Below are a few recent comments from Superior Court clerks about the Authority and the importance of its support, particularly its COVID-19 actions including the promo code offer:

> *"I just want to take a moment to thank you and the amazing staff of the Clerks' Authority! This has been a rough time for all of us.....yet you guys keep stepping up to the plate to make it work for me and all Clerks around this Great State! You all are truly wonderful! Thank you for all you do…[and] please pass this to all [staff] that are not listed! There are so many in the background that do amazing tasks! They have not been forgotten!!"*
>
> *– Sheila Studdard, Clerk*
> *Fayette County Superior Court*

> *"AMEN!!! I have always said without the Authority I would not want to be a CLERK!!!!!!"*
>
> *– Cindy G. Brown, Clerk*
> *Coweta County Superior Court*

> *"I absolutely agree and I don't say it often enough. Clerks' Authority ROCKS my world … and I am grateful to [them] every day!!!!"*
>
> *– Nancy F. Ross, Clerk*
> *Irwin County Superior Court*

> *"THANK YOU, Authority!!! Without you, my office would not function as effectively as it does today. The Authority works for the best interest of each clerk's office—no matter how big or how small. Words cannot express how genuinely thankful I am for each and every member of the Authority staff."*
>
> *– Nora L. Rogers, Clerk*
> *Echols County Superior Court*

> *"A bright spot in a dark time. Thank you Authority!!!! I should say it more often. The Authority rocks!*
>
> *– Beverly Logan, Clerk*
> *Clarke County Superior Court*

"Thank you Clerks' Authority! This will make a very positive effect for our office!"

– Kathy D. Page, Clerk
Dade County Superior Court

"Thank you guys so much. You are the BEST!!!"

– Brenda W. Hicks, Clerk
Worth County Superior Court

"Awesome!!!! Thank you!

– Jody M. Higdon, Clerk
Morgan County Superior Court

COVID-19 made it even more obvious that agile organizations have an edge in adapting to change because they already have processes and structures available to them. From its very beginnings, the Authority has embraced technology, reinvented core processes, and adopted new collaborative tools. That framework was built, not for the pandemic, but for the future…to keep Superior Court clerks relevant and ahead of the curve in meeting their constituents' needs. But that framework which was already in place allowed for a more seamless transition for both Authority staff and Superior Court clerks as we all navigated through uncharted territory. Offices operated remotely and services continued uninterrupted. Using technology and data in new ways and accelerating the scope and scale of innovation is at the heart of what the Authority is all about, and this recent emergency has further highlighted the importance of the 25-year partnership between the Authority and Superior Court clerks and the profound and lasting impact of revolutionizing Superior Court clerks' offices by ushering in a new era of technology.

Background

From the beginning and rooted to its core, innovation, collaboration and vision have defined the Authority. Although the culture remains the same, the GSCCCA is a very different organization today than the one that opened its doors in 1995. Since its inception, the Authority has not only fulfilled its original purpose of establishing a statewide system for the indexing of UCC documents, but has successfully developed and implemented, at no cost to the state, a variety of additional projects. Effective collaboration with other state agencies and numerous not-for-profit groups for the benefit of the State of Georgia and its citizens has become one of the hallmarks of the Authority's success and why it is respected both locally and nationally for its progressive, innovative and effective approach to problem solving.

For two and half decades, the Authority has been an innovator within the public records arena and has led the State of Georgia to the forefront of court technology. Using a mix of old-fashioned cooperation and state-of-the-art technology, the GSCCCA has taken abstract ideas, that many believed were not possible, to the concrete world of implementation, and, in so doing, has changed the way many do business and

made life easier for those accessing real estate records, financing statements, criminal case data, and other legal documents.

Today the Clerks' Authority is a diverse entity that oversees the following:

- ➢ Notary & Authentications Division
- ➢ Fines & Fees Division
- ➢ UCC Project
- ➢ Real Estate Deed Project
- ➢ Historical Deed Re-Indexing Project
- ➢ County-Funded Historical Deed, Lien and Plat Re-Indexing Project
- ➢ eFile Project
- ➢ Lien, Plat & Map Project
- ➢ State Tax Lien eFiling Project
- ➢ PT-61 Project
- ➢ Premium Search Account
- ➢ Clerks' Authority Map Search Application (Mobile App)
- ➢ Protective Order Registry
- ➢ Criminal Case Data Project (Offender-Based Tracking System)
- ➢ Carbon Sequestration Registry
- ➢ MyVault Online Archive Program
- ➢ Georgia Archives Initiative
- ➢ Notary Scanning Project
- ➢ Virtual Microfilm (VMF) Program

In successfully developing and implementing these projects, the Authority helped modernize Superior Court clerk offices and created several one-of-a-kind systems that integrated and standardized information from each of Georgia's 159 counties on a central website, www.gsccca.org. The Authority databases provide accountability, uniformity, efficiencies and cost-savings by affording:

- ➢ Unprecedented access to valuable information—free access through search terminals installed in all Superior Court clerk offices, and convenient internet access, by subscription, for those desiring 24-hour, 7-day-a-week access.
- ➢ Additional funding and new equipment for clerks' offices—$79 million and 27,000 pieces of new equipment in total.
- ➢ Information that allows lawmakers to more effectively set public policy.
- ➢ Critical and timely crime data to protect the safety of the public and law enforcement officers throughout Georgia.

Governed by a board of ten members whose meetings are open to the public, the GSCCCA was created, implemented and continues to operate without receiving any funds through local, state or federal taxes.

The Authority has been continually praised for its wise use of available resources, and has proven to be a resounding success for offering unique services to Georgia counties and citizens.

Accomplishments – Highlights from FY 2020

In addition to the COVID-19-related actions stated earlier, following are other highlights or major accomplishments from the past fiscal year:

- ➤ **Compensated clerks' offices** nearly $6 million this fiscal year for prints off the Authority website ($68 million for prints since the Authority was established), and nearly $1 million this fiscal year for deed images ($18.8 million for deed images since inception of the project).
- ➤ Achieved important milestone in October 2019 by completing the import of all real estate records ever received by the Authority into the **Virtual Microfilm (VMF) system.** Now, for the first time, all deeds, including all deeds from voluntary or sponsored historical projects, liens and plats ever received by the Authority are directly available to clerks without the clerk having to make a records request or having to search the GSCCCA search system. The VMF image archive program not only provides an alternative to the traditional microfilm process, but provides clerks with easier access to their archived digital records and further protects them consistent with the law. With over **270 million** deed, lien and plat images loaded and available for viewing online, the initial VMF Program goals have exceeded expectations. Every month, new images are imported into the system and are available for viewing through the online portal at https://vmf.gsccca.org.
- ➤ Completed the **1991-90 Historical Project** in October of 2019 with 90 counties participating. The project concluded with the Authority adding over 820,000 deed records to its publicly searchable website, and moving the statewide "good-from" date to 1/1/1990.
- ➤ Launched program to provide **Microsoft Office** and **Adobe Acrobat** to Superior Court clerk offices. Met with tremendous success, this initiative was born from the Authority's strategic planning efforts in 2019. Through that process, the Authority sought feedback from clerks which reflected the need for various pieces of productivity software that had become essential for doing business in the clerk's office. This past spring, the Authority's customer support team proactively reached out to every county on a one-on-one basis to solicit information about their software needs, and then scheduled a plan to acquire and deploy the software packages.
- ➤ Honored with the *2019 Award for Excellence in Archival Program Development by a State Agency*. The award was sponsored by the Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council, an advisory body for historical records planning in the state. The Authority and the Council of Superior Court Clerks of Georgia were nominated together for their joint work in promoting disaster planning awareness and, specifically, for the development of the Authority's statewide **MyVault Online Archive Program**, which protects the digital records of Georgia's Superior Court clerks. MyVault is currently storing and protecting over 950 million files totaling more than 157 TBs of live data, available for recovery in the event of a disaster. Since 2007, MyVault has responded to 153 data loss requests and has restored over 3.5 TBs of data back to county systems. In FY 2020, the Authority received 30 requests to restore data, resulting in over 1 TB of data successfully restored.

- Advanced the **Georgia Archives Initiative**. In an ongoing effort to promote the importance of disaster planning, Authority staff broadened its outreach by offering all clerks the opportunity to obtain a full list of their media holdings at the Georgia Archives. Archive staff facilitated this effort by working with the Georgia Archives to retrieve and deliver the lists to 140 participating counties. Phase two of this initiative is underway to begin transcribing this information for further review and comparative analysis. The goal is to produce a meaningful report that will help identify what records may or may not be protected in the clerk's office and reveal any gaps that may exist in their data protection plans. Equipped with this information, clerks can begin to make more informed decisions about how best to protect those records in the future.
- Completed the **Notary Scanning Project**, a short-term project that was initiated in FY 2019 and involved the digital scanning of over 260,000 notary certificates for long-term protection. These images will now be loaded into the Virtual Microfilm (VMF) system and will be available for viewing.
- Continued to grow **Real Estate eRecording** – All 159 counties participate to some degree, with 135 counties accepting all document types, 25 more than last fiscal year. Since the launch of Real Estate eRecord in 2011, over 2.1 million real estate documents have been electronically filed with nearly 908,000 of those during FY 2020. The tremendous growth of Real Estate eRecording—a 60.5% increase in usage this year compared to the previous fiscal year—is one of the few silver linings of the coronavirus.
- Continued to grow **UCC eFile** – 13 new counties were activated this fiscal year for a current total of 144 participating counties. As of June 30, 43 of those counties only allow the electronic filing of UCCs, 33 more than last year. Since the launch of UCC eFile in 2009, nearly 934,000 UCCs have been electronically filed with over 216,000 of those eFiled in FY 2020. A record number of 40,400 UCC eFilings were accepted in June 2020, and usage was up by 57% compared to the previous fiscal year.
- Published the **UCC eFile API** (application programming interface). This new web API allows filers to submit and pay the Authority directly through their own proprietary software, increasing the efficiency of UCC submission. Additionally, county vendors can utilize the API to accept and reject submitted UCCs, giving counties more flexibility in how they process UCCs.
- Added **UCC auto-numbering** feature which allows the system to automatically assign the next available UCC financing statement number for counties who participate in UCC eFile. This allows a clerk's office to have multiple users processing UCC eFilings simultaneously while preventing duplicate file numbers. The auto-numbering feature also streamlines the process, particularly for high-volume filers who may utilize bulk receipts, and allows these counties to process 1,000 filings on one receipt and be assured that the numbers are all accounted for. Currently, 21 counties have implemented UCC auto-numbering.
- Increased **Premium Search accounts** by over 12% for a fiscal year-end total of 5,051 accounts. Launched in 2012, the Premium account includes the Clerks' Authority Map Search Application and allows users to search by property address as well as land lot making it attractive to realtors, bankers, attorneys, surveyors, appraisers, and other members of the business community.
- Added additional instruments to our website through the **County-Funded Historical Deed, Lien and Plat Re-Indexing Project** for a total of over 3.1 million instruments in production since the

program was implemented in 2013. As a result of this project, the public has access to additional real estate information at no additional cost to the Authority, and clerks' offices have access to additional resources through print image fees initiated through the Authority's website. Fifty-five counties are now participating in the program.

➢ Implemented **Mimecast**, a cloud-based email security solution, in a continuing effort to protect the Authority and Superior Court clerks against cyberattacks. The program gives users more control over their email; adds anti-spoofing protections; adds URL/link re-writing and scanning to check destination against known bad actors; greatly improves spam detection; moves the bulk of email processing to the cloud; and speeds up automated email processing by 50%. Since implementation, the Authority has processed 10.8 million emails. Out of 3.4 million inbound emails, the Authority has stopped 800,000 pieces of spam and virus-laden emails.

➢ Maintained a compliance rate of close to **100%** for all courts through a dedicated and consistent notification process by the **Fines & Fees Division**.

Program Statistics – Highlights from FY 2020

In addition to the many enhancements and new features that were added over the last twelve months, the Authority continued to successfully manage its many existing programs. Numbers don't tell the full story but the following statistics show the volume of work handled by the Authority and its importance to Superior Court clerk offices and our other constituencies across the state and beyond.

Following are some of the highlights from the past fiscal year:

➢ Added over **15 million** images to the GSCCCA search system for a fiscal year-end total of over **287 million** images accessible to the public through www.gsccca.org.

➢ Had **475 million** page views and **1.2 million** unique visitors on www.gsccca.org. The public accessed the Authority's invaluable data via the internet nearly **5.5 million times** from **218 countries** this past fiscal year.

➢ Ordered, processed and shipped nearly **2,100 pieces of new equipment** to clerks' offices including CPUs, monitors, servers, laptops and scanners. Of this total, the Authority deployed **1,512** pieces of new equipment (922 computers, 232 monitors and 275 scanners) to 50 Superior Court clerk offices to replace depreciated equipment as part of the Authority's Statewide Computer Replacement Project for all 159 counties. The Authority has provided over **29,000** pieces of new equipment to clerks' offices since opening its doors in 1995.

➢ Supported Superior Court clerks and staff, website users and other customers by handling nearly **19,000 phone calls** and over **10,300 emails** to HelpDesk, the Authority's customer support team.

➢ Conducted **85** classroom training sessions, webinars and one-on-one programs on various subjects for over **900** participants at **21** different locations around the state. The Authority also trained nearly **14,000** people through its seven online courses. Over **107,000 users** have benefitted from accessing the Authority's Learning Management System (LMS) since its inception in 2006.

- Indexed approximately **246,000 UCCs** and conducted approximately **8,000 Certified Searches** for FY 2020. Since the project's inception in 1995, the Authority has indexed nearly **6.6 million** UCCs and conducted nearly **272,000** Certified Searches.
- Increased participation in **Notary Online** to **144 counties. 96%** of notary applications in Georgia were submitted electronically via the Authority's Notary Online application system.
- Maintained the statewide notary database. A statewide total of approximately **40,600 notary commissions** were issued by clerks of Superior Court and then submitted to the Authority for inclusion in the statewide database.
- Issued approximately **35,300 apostilles** this past fiscal year. In FY 2020, the Notary & Authentications Division served over **6,700 walk-in customers**, processed approximately **4,800 mail-in orders,** answered nearly **9,100 phone calls**, and sold approximately **1,000 Notary Handbooks**.
- Collected and disbursed approximately **$79 million** in court fees; performed annual court reviews on approximately **1,100 courts** to help ensure the accuracy of the data being reported to the Authority; and processed nearly **31,000 monthly reports** submitted by reporting entities.
- Electronically transmitted to the Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC), a division of the GBI, over **45,000 Protective Orders** indexed by clerks.
- Electronically transmitted to GCIC over **252,000 records of criminal court dispositions** from various courts in Georgia for the purpose of compiling criminal histories and background checks.
- Upgraded **26 county connections**. With the proliferation of eFiling and the recent increased need for remote access and VPN, network bandwidth demands continue to increase. With the rise of fiber availability, the Authority can work with any service provider necessary to facilitate the needs of the location.
- Backed up an aggregated **942 TBs of data** during FY2020. If this data were transferred to Ultra HD 4K Blu-rays, it would require 9,420 disks, and the resulting stack would be over 40 feet tall.

Adapting to Change & Looking Ahead

Fostering and embracing a symbiotic relationship for over a quarter century, the Authority and Superior Court clerks have successfully worked together to innovate, adapt to change, and continue to move the technology needle. This year was no different … although the circumstances were unprecedented, the results were the same: we entered uncharted territory, identified needs and new ways to operate, and then responded with solutions to adapt and help navigate our new normal with success.

Even before COVID-19 struck, the Authority had experienced a year of change and a passing of the guard, so to speak, with two significant retirements. Authority Chair Jean Rogers retired as Crisp County Superior Court clerk and stepped away from the Authority board after serving on it for nearly two decades, the last three as chair. Serving as the Authority's first female chair and only the fourth chair in the Authority's history, Jean had been a tremendous advocate for the GSCCCA since its inception in 1993. Her willingness to embrace and leverage technological change for the benefit of her office and those that she served was a shining example for all Superior Court clerks and other governmental offices.

In addition to Jean, long-time Authority consultant John Myers retired after a lengthy and fruitful career as a principal research scientist at Georgia Tech and then many successful years heading his own tech company, MIT, which has overseen the Authority's project planning, development and other technology needs for nearly two decades. By bringing this critical function in-house, the Authority was able to set its own destiny, have total control of its systems, and effect change more quickly and efficiently. Having control and flexibility is even more important in times of adversity as we have clearly seen during the recent challenge of operating amidst a global pandemic.

The importance of the nearly 30-year, prolific and highly successful partnership with John and his talented team of software architects and engineers cannot be overstated. Without question, his quiet, behind-the-scenes guidance, technological savvy, and sage advice will be sorely missed. In another example of a seamless and successful transition, however, the reins of MIT have been turned over to a very familiar face to all clerks, Authority IT Director Andy Wightwick.

Andy has played a major role for over two decades in keeping the Authority and Superior Court clerks on the cutting edge of technology, both responding to current technological demands and anticipating future needs. With his remarkable energy and intellect, seasoned and committed leadership skills, and wealth of historical knowledge of the people and programs of the Authority, Andy is the perfect person for the job and the Authority and Superior Court clerks are certainly fortunate to have him on our team. As always, Andy remains completely committed to the operation of the GSCCCA IT department and the Superior Court clerks of Georgia.

Along with adjusting to the well-deserved retirements of Jean and John, the Authority also mourned the loss of its first chairman and longtime Pulaski County Superior Court clerk, Woodson Daniel, who passed away on September 26, 2019. Woodson exhibited an unwavering support for Georgia's Superior Court clerks and fought for the creation of the Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Cooperative Authority. He served as Authority chair for 12 years and has been called the "godfather" and "heart and soul" of the Authority.

Jean, John and Woodson were part of the leadership teams that guided the Authority to the organization we know today: a successful, diverse entity that oversees 20+ projects including an invaluable website that currently holds over 287 million images and was accessed by over 1.2 million people this past year. Their extraordinary leadership, guidance and vision, in an unprecedented time of technological growth, allowed the Authority to flourish and maximize a variety of products and services for the benefit of Superior Court clerk offices and the citizens of Georgia.

The Authority has faced uncertainty throughout its history, but has always found ways to adapt, advance and thrive. The COVID-19 pandemic could prove to be a decisive turning point and will likely present more challenges that will require more changes and more pivots. We may have to rethink—not retweak—plans and models, but will continue to monitor the rapidly changing situation and stand ready to do whatever necessary to support the needs of Superior Court clerks and our other customers.

On the other side of every challenge is an opportunity. Nurturing a next normal that will be better than what it replaced will be a long-term test for all institutions. As always, instead of looking to the past, it will be critical to seize the moment, reimagine and reinvent the future, and build new muscle and capabilities. This will prepare and position us to capitalize on future opportunities as the economy begins to recover and the world begins to look normal again.

The following pages provide an overview of the Authority and its numerous projects, and a more detailed review of the many accomplishments of the past fiscal year.

Information about www.gsccca.org

The Authority's website, www.gsccca.org, allows centralized, online searches of data from Georgia's 159 counties giving the public unprecedented access to valuable information including UCC financing statements, real estate deeds, liens, plats and maps, PT-61s, and more. Free access to this information is available during regular business hours through public search terminals installed in each county's Superior Court clerk office. Convenient internet access is also available, by subscription, and provides users with 24-hour, 7-day-a-week access.

The public accessed the Authority's invaluable data via the internet nearly 5.5 million times from 218 countries in FY 2020. Information that previously required physical trips to county courthouses to retrieve can now be gained from the convenience of one's home or office through the Authority's website saving Georgia citizens and businesses an unquantifiable amount of time and money every year. Moreover, the Authority's website moved from "convenient" to "critical" when courthouses were closed to walk-in traffic following COVID-19, but the public still had access to important information through www.gsccca.org.

Website Statistics for FY 2020

- Images added to the GSCCCA search system: 15 million
- Total images in the GSCCCA search system: 287 million
- Sessions: 5.5 million
- Data Transferred/Bandwidth: 13.72 TBs
- Page views: 475 million
- Unique visitors: 1.2 million
- Average page views per visit: 25
- Average visit duration: 13:26 minutes
- Number of countries that visited: 218
- Top 4 countries: U.S., India, Philippines and United Kingdom
- 52% of all visitors use Chrome; 18% use Safari; 16% use Internet Explorer; 6.6% use Edge; and 5% use Firefox
- 24% of users access website using mobile device
- 61% of mobile users use iOS and 35% use Android

The Authority understands the importance of its data and prioritizes making its website accessible and organized. With the volume and diversity of information contained in the website and the variety of audiences that it serves, the Authority wants to ensure that each visitor is provided a user-centric experience that is tailored to his or her needs—whether the visitor is a Superior Court clerk, a real estate professional, a notary public, or a property lawyer.

As web users evolve and their needs and devices change, it is more important than ever for online services to grow and expand their online presence. And with over 1.2 million annual, distinct visitors to www.gsccca.org, the Authority believes that it is critical for its site to be clear, responsive and easy-to-use for its customers, and will continue to look at ways to improve the user experience.

Website Subscribers

➢ Total (Regular + Premium Search) monthly subscribers as of 6/30/20: (2019: **16,993) 18,222**
➢ Regular monthly subscribers as of 6/30/20: **13,171**
➢ Premium Search monthly subscribers as of 6/30/20: (2019: **4,486) 5,051**
➢ Percentage increase in Premium Search accounts for FY 2020: **12.6%**
➢ Single-use subscribers added during fiscal year: **30,487**

### Website Subscribers (in thousands) by Fiscal Year
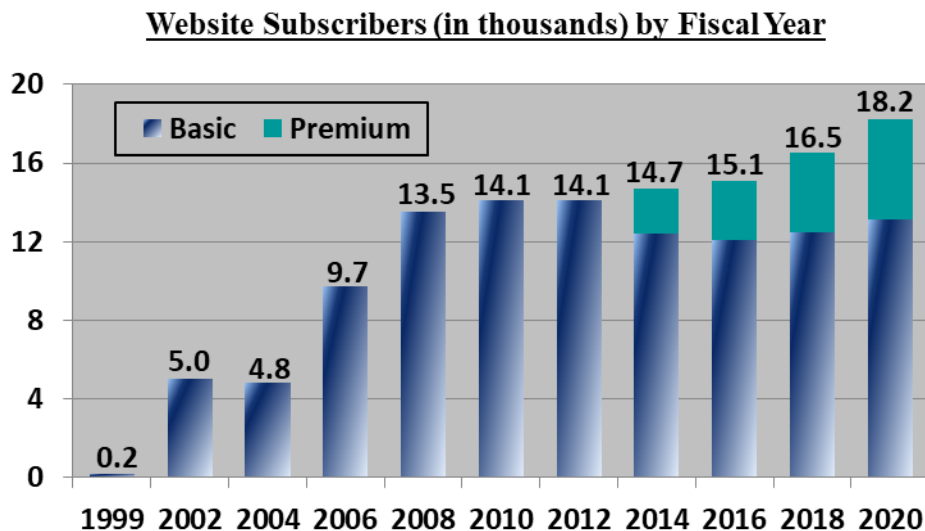
Since 1999, website subscriptions have increased dramatically, clear evidence of the Authority's growth and the growing value of its statewide indexes. Beyond the numbers, though, the Authority gauges its success and relevance on the response and feedback from its customers and how integral the Authority's website and databases have become to their businesses.

Images Added to Website

Each year, millions of images are added to www.gsccca.org making it an even more valuable resource to our customers. During FY 2020, over **15 million** images were added to the GSCCCA search system for a fiscal year-end total of **287 million-plus images**. See the following chart and bar graph for more details.

	Images Added in FY 2020	Total Images on 6/30/20
Deeds	12,868,760	248,034,426
Liens	1,250,536	22,326,893
Plats	131,274	1,297,137
UCCs	337,227	8,815,731
PT-61s	413,290	6,909,055
Total	**15,001,087**	**287,383,242**

Images in GSCCCA Search System (in millions) by Fiscal Year
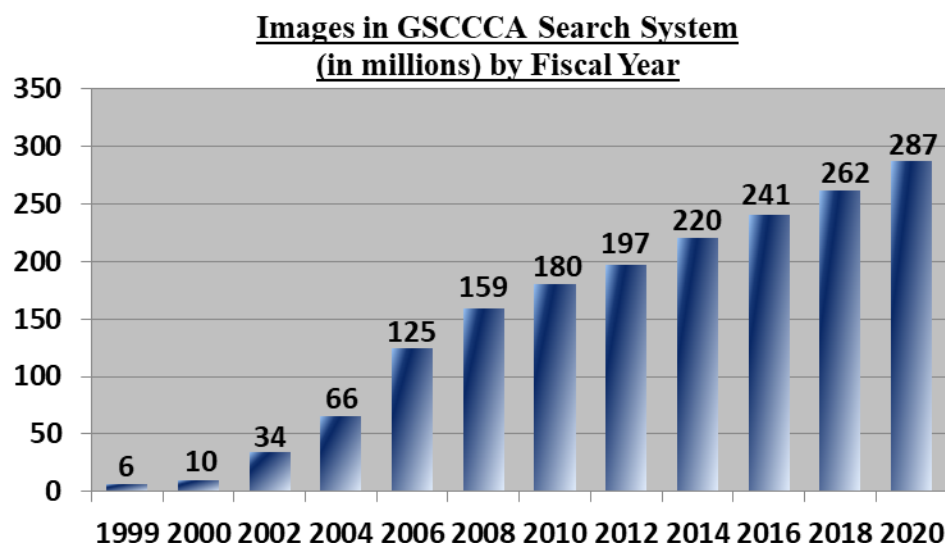
Website Reliability & Security

The Authority places a high priority on providing its subscribers reliable, 24/7 service. Soon after opening, it was realized that any web-based reporting system had points where system failures could occur. In response, the Authority began distributing thousands of PCs, scanners and other equipment to Georgia's 159 counties—over **29,000 pieces of new equipment** since opening its doors in 1995—to ensure the quality of their equipment. The Authority systematically upgraded its network service and main data center, and continually takes preventive action to avoid service interruptions. Despite growth of 200 subscribers and 6 million images in 1999 to over **18,000 subscribers** and **287 million images** today, the Authority has virtually eliminated downtime. Whether a user searches the records on Wednesday morning or Saturday at midnight, the Authority's database servers provide the search results in seconds.

The Authority is committed to the preservation of the data with which it has been entrusted and the public's access to it. To this end, the Authority established a fully redundant remote data center and brought it online in 2009. As a result, the public will be able to search the Authority's databases through www.gsccca.org without interruption, even if the Authority's primary data center is destroyed in a

disaster. In fact, the Authority routinely operates from its remote data center during scheduled maintenance in order to prevent users from experiencing downtime during necessary maintenance.

As important, the Authority takes the security of its websites very seriously and constantly evaluates its practices against current standards and industry best practices. As an example, the Authority conducts quarterly, independent security audits, the results of which are critical to maintaining its PCI (payment card industry) compliance—adherence to a set of specific security standards that were developed to protect card information during and after a financial transaction. If an issue is identified, the IT staff takes appropriate actions to resolve it immediately.

The Authority values its customers and recognizes that their input serves to make our systems cleaner and better. For example, the Authority added an image reporting function to our image viewers so customers can quickly and easily report issues with any image on our site. Whether it's suggesting an additional feature to a particular program or reporting a problem with an image, customer feedback—good or bad— is valued and encouraged. The Authority enhances its programs and upgrades its systems regularly, and proudly incorporates customer feedback and suggestions.

Financial Overview

The Authority receives no appropriated funds from the legislature of the State of Georgia. Its primary source of funding is through the real estate deed fee. The Authority receives a $5 fee for every deed filed and $12 for every UCC filed with a Superior Court clerk. The real estate deed fees and UCC fees, along with subscription fees for access to the Authority's statewide indexes, provide the majority of the funding to operate many of the Authority's programs.

The financial condition of the Authority remained strong throughout FY 2020, with revenues exceeding budget. This surplus is primarily due to deed fee revenue performing better than in recent fiscal years, but is also due to other projects performing ahead of expectations. The Authority is well positioned to meet its upcoming FY 2021 budgeted obligations and continues to aggressively manage project and administrative costs.

FY 2019 Year-end Audit Completed by Mauldin & Jenkins

- Received an unqualified "clean" opinion from Mauldin & Jenkins for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2019 audit.
- No audit adjustments were proposed by the auditors.
- Coordinated all requests with auditors from Mauldin & Jenkins and Georgia Department of Audits.

Monthly Financial Information

- Provided accurate and timely monthly financial statements, along with an executive summary, to the Authority's executive director and board members helping facilitate informed decisions.
- Managed the financial transactions relating to GSCCCA Image Agreements and provided monthly statements to clerks. During FY 2020, the Authority compensated Superior Court clerk offices almost $6 million for print monies generated and nearly $1 million for deed images transmitted to the Authority by clerks' offices.
- Provided quarterly financial reviews at all board meetings.
- Completed monthly reconciliations and review of all general ledger accounts to ensure proper recording of financial data included in the monthly financial statements.
- Updated fixed asset database monthly for all asset additions and dispositions.
- Aggressively managed GSCCCA subscriber accounts to help boost a collection rate of 98%.
- Sent monthly past-due collection letters to help reduce the amount of bad debt write-offs.
- Ensured timely deactivation of past-due accounts to help reduce the amount of charges that can be incurred by delinquent subscribers.

Accounting Information

- Total active subscriber accounts as of June 30, 2020: **18,222**
  This includes **5,051** Premium Search accounts.
- Average monthly direct access subscription revenue during FY 2020: **$269,021**
- Single-use subscription revenue during FY 2020: **$152,435**
- Number of monthly check payments processed during FY 2020: **10,981**
- Purchased **$1,357,250** of equipment for counties during FY 2020 as part of the Authority's Statewide Computer Replacement Project.
- Amount compensated to clerks' offices for deed images:
  - During FY 2020: **$986,720**
  - Since inception of project: **$18.8 million**
- Amount compensated to clerks' offices for prints ($.50 per print) off the Authority website:
  - During FY 2020: **$5,960,309**
  - Since inception of project: **$68 million**
- FY 2020 break-down for print compensation:
  - Deeds: $5,224,721
  - Liens: $262,286
  - Plats: $309,262
  - PT-61s: $40,626
  - UCCs: $123,414

Divisions

Notary & Authentications Division

In 1997, the Authority was asked by the Georgia Secretary of State to begin maintaining the central database of notaries public. This project contains the following elements:

➤ Maintenance of a central database of all active notaries public (approximately 175,000).
➤ Issuance of apostilles and notary certifications. (An apostille is an international certification of a public document for use in another Hague Convention country.)

In 2004, the Authority developed Notary Online with three goals:

➤ To make the processing of notary applications more efficient in clerks' offices,
➤ To allow counties immediate access to their notary filings and images, and
➤ To simplify the notary application process for the public.

Through the Authority website, the public has free access to search Georgia's notary database. An individual desiring to be a notary public in the State of Georgia can obtain an application from the clerk of Superior Court of the county in which he/she resides. 144 Georgia counties (91%) participate in Notary Online, providing web-based, notary applications using software developed by the Authority.

Serving a vital role in international commerce, the Authority was recognized in 1998 by the U.S. State Department as the only agency, outside of a Secretary of State office, to issue apostilles. The Apostille Treaty is an international treaty (of which the U.S. is a signatory member) that provides for a simplified method of authenticating documents for use in other countries. It certifies the origin (i.e. country) of the public document by authenticating the signature and seal of the issuing public official. Currently, 118 countries participate in the Apostille Treaty, and approximately 4 million apostilles are issued worldwide on an annual basis.

During FY 2020, the Authority issued approximately 35,300 apostilles destined for 107 different countries. These documents originated in 134 different Georgia counties. Types of documents include:

➤ Corporate documents such as company bylaws and articles of incorporation
➤ Powers of attorney
➤ Diplomas
➤ Transcripts
➤ Letters relating to degrees, marital status, references and job certifications
➤ Home studies
➤ Deeds of assignments
➤ Distributorship agreements
➤ Papers for international adoption purposes.

Recent feedback regarding apostilles highlights the Authority's role in helping everyday Georgians and the very real impact the Authority has on people and lives. One customer emailed the following comments following her experience:

"I visited your office today to have sixteen documents apostilled for an adoption. I can't say enough about the two women who provided this service for me. This was absolutely the most pleasant experience I've encountered throughout my family's adoption journey. I was met with a level of friendliness, patience and helpfulness that is very rare. I am so appreciative of these ladies' attitudes. I left their office in a much better mood than when I arrived."

The following message, which was highlighted in a recent Authority newsletter, was sent to Peter Keesom, manager of the Authority's Notary &Authentications Division, from Kari Booth in appreciation for the support Peter and his staff had provided as she and her family were adopting their daughter, Eyleen, from Honduras.

"I wanted to reach out and let you know that we FINALLY brought home our precious daughter from Honduras this past June ... We want to say thank you very much for all that you did to help us along the way. I know it is your job to do apostilles, but your helpfulness the first time we met (even though we were all embarrassed and devastated for our paperwork being incorrect the first time) and all the times after were such a blessing. You gave me encouragement with your humor and patience towards us. I am excited to let you know that our adoption is now complete, although much of this story has only begun. Thank you for your part in helping get Eyleen home. We could not be more full of joy. She is such a blessing to us all, and she now has a permanent family that loves her so much. Thank you for being a part of it all."

Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the Authority's Notary & Authentications Division worked hard to support clerks and to continue providing its services to the general public by doing the following (which were also mentioned earlier in the Executive Summary):

➤ Assisted counties with training on the Authority's Notary Online Mail-In Renewal (MIR) program. This program allows a notary who holds an active commission to mail in their renewal application, pay with a credit card, thus foregoing a trip to the clerk's office. This feature became even more important when clerks' offices were forced to close. Since the Governor's State of Emergency took effect on March 14, 2020, 28 additional counties have signed up and been trained on this program.

➤ Provided drop box service for apostille and authentication requests. Due to the public health concern regarding COVID-19, the Authority suspended all walk-in service effective March 17, 2020. In an effort to provide an additional option to the public, besides its mail-in service, the Authority quickly created a drop box service that would allow people (or couriers) to place their documents in a drop box located just outside the Authority's suite. Notary & Authentications staff then process and mail the documents back, often with a turn-around time of only one day. Additionally, the Authority incorporated a "compassionate service" option providing immediate turn-around for those under severe time constraints. This option allows a customer to call from their car when the documents have been placed in the drop box; staff immediately picks up and authenticates the documents while the customer waits outside. There have been many compelling stories to support the request for compassionate service. The first request came from a woman who was trying to get to Costa Rica to care for her ailing father before the country closed its borders

the next day. With the Authority's help, she ended up on the last flight with her apostille in tow. Another compelling story involved the ex-president of Honduras, Rafael Callejas, who died in Atlanta on April 4. A funeral home called with a need for an apostille as Honduras had a plane landing at Hartsfield-Jackson in a few hours, and the Authority was able to provide immediate service.

Along with the new services listed above, the Authority's Notary & Authentications Division had a busy and successful year with the following highlights for FY 2020:

➢ Maintained the statewide notary database. A statewide total of approximately **40,600 notary commissions** were issued by clerks of Superior Court and then submitted to the Authority for inclusion in the statewide database**.** 96% of these notary commissions were processed through the Authority's web-based system, Notary Online, and 4% through traditional methods.

➢ Issued approximately **35,300 apostilles** this fiscal year destined for 107 different countries. These documents originated in 134 different Georgia counties. One additional country joined the Apostille Treaty: Palau.

➢ Issued **140 certificates of authority**, primarily for use in Puerto Rico.

➢ Provided service to over **6,700 walk-in customers**; processed approximately **4,800 mail-in requests**; and answered nearly **9,100 phone calls.**

➢ Continued promoting Notary Online, now in its 17th year. Participation in the program increased to **144 counties** with 2 of those counties joining this fiscal year. The Authority provides one-on-one training for new counties.

➢ **Completed the Notary Scanning Project**, a short-term project that was initiated in FY 2019 and involved the digital scanning of over 260,000 notary certificates for long-term protection. These images will now be loaded into the Virtual Microfilm (VMF) system for viewing on demand.

➢ Sold **1,000 Notary Handbooks**. In addition to direct sales, the Authority continues to provide notary handbooks at a discounted rate to Superior Court clerk offices. The goal is to provide point of sale education materials to Georgia notaries public. This year, five counties participated in the program with a total of **340** handbooks being sold at the local level. The handbook includes forms and definitions and is an excellent reference for Georgia notary law, notary procedures and best practices.

➢ Conducted **21 training classes** for notaries public at 12 locations around the state with over 930 people attending. Hosted by clerks of Superior Court, these classes provide tremendous exposure for clerks and a valuable service to their constituents. Additionally, two notary classes were taught for other groups including a police department and a Brazilian judicial delegation.

➢ Continued to offer free, web-based **Notary Public online training course**. Over 14,000 people participated in this online training and nearly 9,200 of those took the Notary Public Final Exam.

➢ Served in an advisory role in the formulation of **HB 785** which authorizes remote and electronic notarial acts in the state of Georgia. The bill is currently in committee.

As evidenced by these statistics, the Notary & Authentications staff handles a tremendous workload, but more importantly, they provide professional, efficient and helpful service to each and every one of their customers. Their outstanding work is critical to the continued success of the Authority, and is utilized and appreciated by thousands of people each year.

Fines & Fees Division

Legislation was passed in 2004 which established a new funding mechanism for indigent defense. The Authority was mandated to collect, account for, and disburse to the state treasury and/or beneficiary funds the new and existing fees being collected. Additionally, the Authority was mandated to develop data on the collection and disbursement of all court fees being collected by approximately 1,100 courts throughout the state. Court fines and fees had been added incrementally over many years and little accountability or standards for their collection existed.

To fulfill its new obligations, the Authority established a new division to handle the mandates of the legislation and promulgated rules and regulations to enable the collection of new and existing fees. Information now provided by the Authority's Fines & Fees Division allows policy makers to make more informed decisions as they formulate future legislation.

In 2006, the Authority developed and began offering a Fines & Fees Online Training course to help educate court personnel, private probation companies, clerks and their staff on the reporting of fines and fees and how to comply with the law. The online course enables the different courts and others with an interest in the court fee system to train their personnel at a time of their choosing and save travel costs. The course is updated annually to include legislative changes.

Since being entrusted to oversee court fines and fees, the Authority:

➢ Developed and maintains a website, www.courttrax.org, to support court compliance with the law.
➢ Created and maintains uniform reports.
➢ Provides statewide training.
➢ Issues guidance to all parties affected.
➢ Created and continues to maintain an online calculator to help courts properly calculate and assess fines and fees.
➢ Developed and maintains internal accounting systems to support the indexing and processing of these fees to ensure that collection data can be timely and accurately made available to the public.

In FY 2020, the Authority's Fines & Fees Division:

➢ Collected and disbursed approximately **$79 million** in court fees. This amount is down from previous years by about $7 million due to low collections in May and June because of COVID-19 court closings.
➢ Maintained a **compliance rate of close to 100%** for all courts through a dedicated and consistent notification system.
➢ Performed annual court reviews on approximately **1,100 courts** to help ensure the accuracy of the data being reported to the Authority.
➢ Processed nearly **31,000 monthly reports** submitted by reporting entities.
➢ Continued to hold operational costs to under the statutory limit of $500,000 for 16th year in a row.
➢ Submitted monthly Fines & Fees results to the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council fulfilling statutory reporting requirements for Local Victim Assistance Program funds. Automated monthly reporting provides Criminal Justice Coordinating Council with additional requested data in CSV format for importing into their records.

- Communicated quarterly Fines & Fees results with external groups including the Legislative Budget Office, the Senate Budget Office, the Georgia Supreme Court, the Governor's Office, and the Georgia Public Defenders Council.
- Updated www.courttrax.org, contact information, documents, training materials, forms, rules and regulations, legal advice, the online calculator, and vendor programs to reflect current legislation.
- Fielded questions related to new legislation (HB 239 and HB 288) affecting Fines & Fees.
- Initiated project to do a complete rewrite of Fines & Fees system.
- Continued to refine procedures to ensure the accuracy of the indexed data in the Fines & Fees database.
- Continued promoting and supporting Fines & Fees Online Training course.
- Continued partnering with the Institute of Continuing Judicial Education at the University of Georgia to offer Fines & Fees training to various courts and other groups, in addition to offering training classes around the state, and utilizing remote training by offering webinars on the subject.

Through its efforts to provide accountability and uniformity to the collection of court fees, the Authority continues its leadership in providing timely and accurate court fee information to the public.

Projects

UCC (Uniform Commercial Code) Project

With the passage of legislation in 1993, the State of Georgia established a statewide system for the indexing of Uniform Commercial Code documents. When the Authority began operation on January 1, 1995, Georgia became the first state in the nation to privatize this traditional state function by outsourcing the indexing of the instruments to a third-party vendor.

A UCC (Uniform Commercial Code) Financing Statement is recorded to provide public notice that personal properties have outstanding liens against them. Under the Authority's system, a secured party need only file in one county to receive statewide notification of their lien position. When a filing is presented to a local clerk of Superior Court, the clerk has 24 hours in which to transmit the UCC document to the Authority, and the Authority then has 24 hours in which to add the filing to the statewide index. Before 1995, it was necessary to file in all 159 Georgia counties to receive statewide notification. The Authority's central index provides secured parties with greater protection while saving them both time and money.

In an effort to stay at the forefront of technology and meet the changing needs of users, the Authority successfully launched its **UCC eFile** site to the public in 2010 and began accepting UCC documents for electronic filing. Since the pilot project began in May 2009, nearly **934,000 UCCs** have been electronically filed. This past fiscal year has seen tremendous growth—primarily due to the coronavirus—with a **57% increase** in usage compared to last fiscal year. Nearly **217,000 UCCs** were eFiled in FY 2020, with a record number, 40,400, accepted in June 2020. Additionally, 13 new counties were activated for a current total of **144 participating counties**. As of June 30, 43 of those counties only allow the electronic filing of UCCs, 33 more than last year.

During FY 2020, the Authority:

➢ Indexed and added to database approximately **246,000 UCCs**.
➢ Conducted approximately **8,000 Certified Searches**.
➢ Continued growing **UCC eFile** with a 57% increase in usage compared to last fiscal year and 13 new counties activated.
➢ Published the **UCC eFile API (application programming interface)**. This new web API allows filers to submit and pay the Authority directly through their own proprietary software, increasing the efficiency of UCC submission. Additionally, county vendors can utilize the API to accept and reject submitted UCCs, giving counties more flexibility in how they process UCCs.
➢ Added **UCC auto-numbering** feature which allows the system to automatically assign the next available UCC financing statement number for counties who participate in UCC eFile. This allows a clerk's office to have multiple users processing UCC eFilings simultaneously while preventing duplicate file numbers. The auto-numbering feature also streamlines the process, particularly for high-volume filers who may utilize bulk receipts, and allows these counties to process 1,000 filings on one receipt and be assured that the numbers are all accounted for. Currently, 21 counties have implemented UCC auto-numbering.
➢ Made improvements to **UCC Bulk Image** program:
  o Reworked the UCC Bulk Image process to now include digital delivery of the images instead of shipping DVDs.
  o Created a UCC Bulk Image website so that participants can download current and past DVD ISO files.
  o Converted 250 previously created DVD image files to standardized DVD ISO files.
➢ Continued promoting and supporting **UCC online training.**
➢ Conducted **UCC eFile classroom training** and **UCC webinars** for Superior Court clerk personnel, banks and the legal community.
➢ Fielded UCC inquiries from clerks' offices, the banking industry, private law offices, offices of the United States Attorneys, law enforcement, and the general public.

Since opening in 1995, the Authority has indexed and added to its database nearly **6.6 million UCCs** (approximately 22,000 per month) and conducted nearly **272,000 Certified Searches**. The Authority provides free, statewide access to its valuable database through search terminals installed in all clerk of Superior Court offices. Additionally, the system allows internet access by subscription for parties desiring the convenience of searching the indexes from their office or home.

Real Estate Deed Project

In 1996, legislation was passed in Georgia that required the Authority to develop a consolidated database of the official real and personal property records of all 159 clerks of Superior Court. With this mandate, the Authority created a one-of-a-kind system with no direct cost to the State of Georgia. When the system became operational on January 1, 1999, the public gained unprecedented free access to information within the office of the Superior Court clerk through search terminals installed by the Authority. Additionally, the business community gained 24/7 access to official land records through the Authority's website, www.gsccca.org (by subscription).

The Real Estate Deed Project contains the following elements:

- ➢ Computer access to real property deed indexes of all 159 counties
- ➢ Integration of all 159 counties into an online statewide system
- ➢ Implementation of standards for data files, fields, and index data
- ➢ Standardization of all printed indexes statewide

Following passage of the enabling legislation, the Authority developed and implemented the only statewide intranet network in state government at that time. The system started collecting data from all 159 clerks of Superior Court on January 1, 1999. This data includes the name of the seller and buyer of the property, the location of the property, the book and page where the actual deed or property record is filed in the county, and cross index information to other related records. Searches can be performed by name, book and page, property location, or instrument type, and can be done by county, region (i.e. a county plus all counties that border it) or statewide. Additionally, images of the corresponding records are constantly being added to the online system.

The Authority added nearly **13 million real estate deed images** to the system during FY 2020 to bring the total to over **248 million deed images** in its publicly searchable database. Print fees generated from the system are compensated to the clerk's office where the original document resides. During FY 2020, the Authority compensated clerks' offices in Georgia nearly **$987,000** for deed images added to the system (**$18.8 million** since the project began) and over **$5.2 million** for deed prints made from www.gsccca.org.

In 2004, a new feature was added to the system: access to **Real Estate Transfer Tax forms (PT-61s)**. The Authority worked with the Department of Revenue, the Department of Audits, and the Real Property Section of the State Bar of Georgia to bring this project online. This feature has added even more valuable information to the real estate system: over **413,000** PT-61 images this fiscal year and over **6.9 million** images since the project began. (See the section on the PT-61 Project for more information.)

At the end of 2011, the Authority successfully launched **Real Estate eRecording** statewide. Clerks retain control of the process, and their participation is completely voluntary and at no charge. All 159 counties participate to some degree, with 135 counties accepting all document types, 25 more than last fiscal year. Since the launch of Real Estate eRecord in 2011, over **2.1 million** real estate documents have been electronically filed with nearly **908,000** of those during FY 2020. The tremendous growth of Real Estate eRecording—**60.5%** increase in usage this year compared to last fiscal year—is one of the few silver linings of the coronavirus.

Following is a summary of efforts during FY 2020 to support and enhance the Real Estate Deed Project:

- ➢ Continued processes that monitor incoming real estate data for completeness and accuracy. These processes help ensure incoming data stays synchronized with local courthouse data and create a complete record of real estate document filings.
- ➢ Continued using software and monitoring procedures to detect historical land record data that is not in conformance with the *Indexing Standards for Real and Personal Property Records for the State of Georgia*. This is intended to highlight possible errors in the index data for deed records thus extending the Authority's ability to check the accuracy and ensure the quality of existing and incoming historical deed records. Tens of thousands of real estate, lien and plat data records and images have been reviewed throughout the fiscal year through automated and manual processes.

- Continued the administration of the Authority's "Indexing Certification Exam" resulting in clerks, deputies, and private vendor personnel becoming certified by the Authority to index real and personal property records in accordance with the *Indexing Standards for Real and Personal Property Records for the State of Georgia*. Thus far, 69 clerks and deputies from 23 counties have completed the Indexing Certification.
- Continued efforts to certify the land record recording computer systems of private vendors that are used by clerks for compatibility and compliance with the Authority's data collection system and the Indexing Standards. One vendor achieved certification for their land record recording system in FY 2020.
- Conducted training classes and webinars to train clerks and staff across Georgia on the *Indexing Standards for Real and Personal Property Records for the State of Georgia*.
- Continued offering two online courses, "GSCCCA Indexing Standards" and "GSCCCA Indexing Standards – Extended," and added third course: "GSCCCA Indexing Standards – Common Mistakes." This new online course had been in the works for the past year in response to one of the priority initiatives—to improve current indexing data quality—set by the Authority Board during their 2019 strategic planning session. Following the COVID-19 outbreak, however, the course was quickly completed and published to increase the remote training available to clerks and their staff allowing them to continue receiving training while working from home.
- Provided continuous troubleshooting of issues relating to the deed, lien, and plat filings of all clerks of Superior Court and the transmitting and storage of the related index data to the Authority.
- Provided ongoing telephone and email assistance, available to all clerks of Superior Court, regarding the proper indexing of land records in accordance with the *Indexing Standards for Real and Personal Property Records for the State of Georgia*.

Historical Deed Re-Indexing Project

In 2002, the Authority launched the Historical Deed Re-Indexing Project with the goal of adding land records from Georgia's 159 counties that were filed before the central collection system was implemented to the Authority's online system. (Gwinnett County was the first county to accomplish this feat with a "good-from" date of 1871.) To support this project, the Authority developed further Indexing Standards guidance to help address the challenge of applying current indexing standards to real and personal property records that were locally recorded before the advent of statewide indexing standards.

The project is complex and challenging as the Authority requires the complete re-indexing of these older land records in conformance with current Indexing Standards to create a cohesive record with current data in the system. All indexers performing this re-indexing must pass a Deed Indexing Certification Test developed by the Authority, and collected data is quarantined or held in a queue until quality checks are completed. After passing the quality control checks, the data is released to the Authority's website for public access. The cost to add each additional historical year to the database is approximately $3.6 million dollars.

The Authority completed the **1991-90 Historical Project** in October of 2019 with 90 counties participating. The project concluded with the Authority adding over 820,000 deed records to its publicly searchable website, and moving the statewide "good-from" date to 1/1/1990.

County-Funded Historical Deed, Lien and Plat Re-Indexing Project

In 2013, the Authority developed and implemented a *County-Funded* Historical Deed, Lien and Plat Re-Indexing Project allowing clerks on their own initiative and funding to image and re-index their property records for inclusion in the Authority's system. Fifty-five counties are now participating in this program which allows additional index and image data for deeds, liens, and plats at the clerk's option. Participation is completely voluntary and at the election of the clerk of Superior Court. Highlights of the program include the documentation and comprehensive analysis of all county books and dockets along with the issuance of indexing guidance for the prevention of unintentional book naming conflicts. The result of the process provides an indexing roadmap for all future historical indexing for the clerk as well as awareness of the importance of consistency for current indexing.

Over **3.1 million additional instruments** have been added to the public system since the program began. As a result of this project, the public has access to additional real estate information at no additional cost to the Authority, and clerks' offices have the opportunity to generate additional funding through print image fees initiated through the Authority's website. Many more instruments are expected to be added in the future.

eFile Project

In 2009, the Georgia legislature mandated that the Authority develop rules and regulations related to the electronic recording of real estate-related documents. Anticipating this need and with the continuing goal of keeping clerks' offices at the forefront of technology, the Authority spent years prior to this legislative mandate researching, planning, programming, and testing their eFiling program through an extensive pilot project. Essential to the project was developing a platform that was flexible enough for clerks, bankers, attorneys, and the general public to use.

In 2010, the Authority successfully launched **UCC eFile** to the public and began accepting UCC documents for electronic filing. This past fiscal year, the Authority published a **UCC eFile API** (application programming interface). This new web API allows filers to submit and pay the Authority directly through their own proprietary software, increasing the efficiency of UCC submission. Additionally, county vendors can utilize the API to accept and reject submitted UCCs, giving counties more flexibility in how they process UCCs.

The project continues to grow—at record pace this year, in large part due to the coronavirus, with usage up 57% compared to last fiscal year. Since the launch of UCC eFile pilot project in May 2009, nearly 934,000 UCCs have been electronically filed with over 216,000 of those eFiled in FY 2020. A record number of 40,400 UCC eFilings were accepted in June 2020. Thirteen new counties were activated this fiscal year for a current total of 144 participating counties. Of that total, 43 counties – 33 more than last year – only allow the electronic filing of UCCs.

As a service to Superior Court clerks who were seeking a trusted partner to help participate in a voluntary Child Support eFiling program, the Authority added **Child Support eFiling** to its portal in 2010. This system provides an automated electronic interface to the Child Support eFiling system of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), allowing clerks to integrate directly with the GSCCCA eFiling system instead of a separate system hosted by AOC. Using the GSCCCA portal, clerks can

conveniently receive and process child support cases initiated by DHS, and since January 1, 2010, approximately **663,000** filings have been submitted to the portal.

Over the past fiscal year, however, Child Support eFile has seen a reduction in the number of clerks utilizing the Authority eFiling portal as many clerks have incorporated child support eFiling with civil eFiling and directed filings through their chosen civil eFiling vendor. Currently, 64 counties participate in the Authority's Child Support eFiling program, and approximately **38,000** filings were submitted to the portal during FY 2020.

In 2011, the Authority built a real estate eFiling portal and successfully launched **Real Estate eRecording** statewide. This portal initially allowed filers to use an approved vendor to submit real estate documents on their behalf. Two years later, the Authority extended **Real Estate eRecording** by making it fully accessible to the public through a web interface, further streamlining the eFiling of real estate documents in Georgia. With this added web-based application, users in Georgia, who are eligible to participate in the electronic recording of real estate documents, can access the Authority's website, **efile.gsccca.org,** to file directly with counties from the convenience of their home or office rather than having to travel to the county clerk's office. (It's important to note that this convenience became a critical service when courthouses were closed to walk-in traffic following COVID-19.) Clerks retain control of the process, and participation in many of the projects is completely voluntary. All eFile programs are provided to clerks and the public free of charge.

To support Real Estate eRecording, the Authority developed and published the **www.efileregistry.org** website in 2011. This site was designed to facilitate the registration, maintenance and verification of real estate eFile participants. Working in cooperation with the State Bar of Georgia and the Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Association, the Authority created the eFile registry to provide a secure location for housing approved participants in the eFiling of real estate documents in Georgia. In FY 2020, over **3,900** new participants were added to the eFile Registry for a current total of **11,463 registered participants**. To further support eFile participants, the Authority maintains an eFile User Manual, a guide to assist filers as they navigate within the site and to provide support for technical questions.

Primarily due to the coronavirus, FY 2020 saw a huge spike in usage—a **60.5% increase** over the previous fiscal year with nearly **908,000** real estate eFilings. All 159 clerks' offices participate in the program to some degree:

- ➢ 135 offices accept all document types (a 23% increase over last year);
- ➢ 12 offices accept all document types except deeds;
- ➢ 11 offices accept plat and state tax lien document types;
- ➢ 1 office accepts plat, state tax lien, and a combination of deeds and/or lien document types.

Before COVID-19, however, the increase in eFiling participation was due, in part, to legislation that had passed over the last several years. In 2016, a bill passed that required all plats in Georgia to be electronically recorded beginning January 1, 2017. Through a cooperative effort with clerks and vendors, the Authority implemented the changes necessary to fulfill the requirements of the law. Specifically, the Authority expanded its eFiling portal to accommodate the shift to mandatory plat eRecording, which allows all Superior Court clerks to be able to electronically process plats that have been submitted to the GSCCCA portal in compliance with the eRecording mandate. Since inception, over **86,000** plats have been eFiled, with over **25,000** of those during FY 2020. The Authority Board adopted plat eFiling rules and regulations which are posted under the eFiling information tab of www.gsccca.org/learn.

In 2017, legislation was passed by the Georgia General Assembly that mandated the electronic filing of state tax liens, but the Act was substantially modified by a second bill that was passed in 2018. During both sessions, the Authority worked with all interested stakeholders to reach a revised solution, and continued to work with these groups to help implement the new law. Since the mandatory effective date of January 1, 2018, the Department of Revenue (DOR) has successfully eFiled over **331,000 state tax liens** with Superior Court clerks by filing through the Authority's eFile portal; nearly **33,000** of those were eFiled this fiscal year.

Since 2011 when the Authority launched Real Estate eRecording, participants have eFiled over **2.1 million** real estate documents. These numbers are made more impressive when considering the fact that for the majority of the history of the eRecording system, participation has been purely voluntary. With recent legislative changes mandating certain types of real estate documents be electronically recorded, each of the 159 Superior Court clerks now have systems that directly interface with the GSCCCA eFiling portal. Because the technical barriers for clerks to participate had largely been overcome, it allowed the spike in usage following the outbreak of COVID-19 and ensuing shelter-in-place orders. Considering the momentum of the existing eFiling systems, our successful track-record of implementing legislatively mandated programs, and the increased participation by clerks' offices and filers as a result of the coronavirus, it is expected that eFiling numbers will continue to rise significantly in the coming years.

From the beginning, the Authority's goal for its eFiling service has been to protect the autonomy of Superior Court clerks, improve the technology within their offices, streamline the document-filing process, and give the public access to convenient and effective tools—all at no cost to state or local government. And to add to these benefits, the Authority offers its eFiling service without imposing additional fees above the base filing fee.

Today, the Authority's electronic filing portal, efile.gsccca.org, allows for the filing of UCC, real estate, lien, plat, PT-61, and child support documents, and the list will continue to grow. As thousands of documents are now being eFiled annually, the Authority continues to assess, improve, and streamline the user experience in its ongoing efforts to stay ahead of the curve and provide state-of-the-art services.

Lien, Plat & Map Project

When H.B. 1582 took effect in January of 2004, clerks of Superior Court began to transmit to the GSCCCA lien, plat and map indices and digital images. The Authority worked to certify all existing vendors, train clerks of Superior Court, and provide necessary equipment. New scanners and PCs were distributed to counties and bandwidth (both locally and at the Authority) was increased to accommodate this project. Due to the accelerated influx of document images along with other system growth demands, the Authority significantly increased the capacity of its core storage system in 2011 from 26 TBs to 71 TBs.

Legislation was passed in 2016 that required all plats in Georgia to be electronically recorded beginning January 1, 2017. Through a cooperative effort with clerks and vendors, the Authority implemented the changes necessary to fulfill the requirements of this new law. Specifically, the Authority expanded its eFiling portal to accommodate the shift to mandatory plat eRecording, and all Superior Court clerks are able to electronically process plats that have been submitted to the GSCCCA portal in compliance with the eRecording mandate. Since becoming legislatively mandated on January 1, 2017, over **86,000** plats have been accepted through the portal, over **25,000** of those during FY 2020. The process of

electronically filing plats has resulted in a more efficient end-to-end process and higher fidelity recreation of printed plat copies.

In 2017, legislation was passed by the Georgia General Assembly that mandated the electronic filing of state tax liens, but the Act was substantially modified by a second bill that was passed in 2018. See more details in the following section.

State Tax Lien eFiling Project

The 2017 legislative session brought significant change to the lien project. Working closely with legislators, the Superior Court Clerks' Association of Georgia, the legal community, the land title industry, and the Department of Revenue (DOR), the Authority helped forge a solution for the electronic filing of state tax liens resulting in the agreement of House Bill 337 which was signed into law.

From passage until its effective date of January 1, 2018, the Authority spent tremendous time and effort building the systems necessary for the DOR to successfully eFile liens through the GSCCCA portal. The Authority also designed and developed a standard that can be used to electronically file state tax liens directly from the Department of Revenue to the GSCCCA, and subsequently to the counties. During the 2018 legislative session, however, the Georgia General Assembly passed another bill (HB 661) that substantially modified the 2017 Act. The Authority had again worked closely with legislators as well as all affected parties to bring about this revised solution.

Since the mandated start date of January 1, 2018, the Department of Revenue has eFiled over **331,000 liens** with Superior Court clerks through the Authority's eFile portal, with nearly **33,000** of those eFiled this fiscal year. The Authority is continuing to develop tools for clerks to update, review and maintain the accuracy of the pending lien search, and has implemented a streamlined notification process which has reduced processing times.

PT-61 Project

Launched in September of 2004, PT-61 e-Filing is a collaborative program between the GSCCCA and the Department of Revenue (DOR) to provide a more efficient process for filing a Real Estate Transfer Tax form (PT-61 form). Rather than completing a multi-part paper form, the new system allows the filer to log onto www.gsccca.org from his/her office and complete the form online. The program provides for the more efficient transfer of tax data to the DOR and local tax assessors via weekly electronic reports.

With the 2012 launch of the Authority's Premium Search account, users have additional search and view options related to PT-61 data. The Authority also integrated PT-61 form generation with the Real Estate eFiling process. By combining these two separate systems, eFilers save time and records are filed faster and more accurately.

During FY 2020, the Authority:

> ➢ Added nearly **420,000** PT-61 filings to the statewide system for a total of nearly **6.8 million** PT-61 records. These filings were accepted and activated by the counties and then sent to the Georgia Department of Revenue and Georgia Department of Audits.

- Compensated clerks' offices nearly **$41,000** for prints ($.50 per print) off the Authority website related to the PT-61 Project.
- Added nearly **194,000** properties during FY 2020 for a total of nearly **2.9 million** searchable addresses.

Premium Search Account

In January of 2012, the Authority launched a Premium Search account with new search and view options for the Authority's valuable statewide indexes. Based on suggestions from subscribers, the premium account allows users to:

- Pinpoint the property for which they are searching by simply entering the street address.
- Browse PT-61s for a specific day, week, or month.
- Search real estate by county and instrument type.
- View data in a variety of new options.
- Access data anytime and anywhere through a mobile application using GPS data. (See more information below on the Clerks' Authority Map Search Application.)

The Premium Search account, which includes the Clerks' Authority Map Search Application, is a valuable tool, and helps realtors, bankers, attorneys, surveyors, appraisers, and other members of the business community do their jobs more efficiently and effectively. The Premium account features are especially invaluable for searching sales in small counties where there is no MLS or listing of properties for sale.

During FY 2020, the Authority increased the number of Premium Search accounts by over **12%** for a fiscal year-end total of **5,051 accounts**. This number will continue to grow in the coming years as the Authority markets the Premium Search account and users recognize its benefits.

Clerks' Authority Map Search Application (Mobile App)

Launched in 2012, the Clerks' Authority Map Search Application provides the most up-to-date and accurate real estate sales data in the state of Georgia, and is the only mobile app that provides real-time sales data on the official source of property transfer tax data in Georgia. Since launching, the application has received rave reviews from users, and is available free-of-charge to Premium Search account subscribers.

Features of the Map Search app include:

- Real-time sales information
- Sales history
- Official county records
- Deeds
- Liens
- Plats

The application is available on Android devices, iPhones and iPads, and the Authority continuously improves the functionality on IOS and Android devices ensuring that the applications work as designed with the latest versions of the respective operating systems. To add more value, nearly **194,000 properties** were added for a fiscal year-end total of nearly **2.9 million searchable addresses** in the application.

Through the Authority's Map Search application, real estate professionals, and all other consumers, now have 24/7 access to the most comprehensive real estate information anywhere in Georgia right at their fingertips from their smartphones or tablets.

Protective Order Registry

The Protective Order Registry is an online service that stores all Protective Orders issued by the Superior Courts of Georgia as authorized by the Family Violence statutes of the state. Clerks of Superior Court are responsible for indexing the required data for Orders filed in their courts, electronically scanning the Orders, and attaching the images of the Orders to the indexed data. Clerks transmit the indexed data and the Order images to the Authority. The Authority then verifies and forwards the transmissions to the Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC) computer system.

The Protective Order Registry, accessed by law enforcement through GCIC terminals, displays all Protective Orders and related data. In FY 2020, over **45,000 Protective Orders** were indexed by clerks, and then electronically transmitted by the Authority to GCIC. Through the efforts of the Authority, critical information for protecting the public is now easily accessible to law enforcement nationwide.

Criminal Case Data Project (Offender-Based Tracking System)

Launched in 2003, the Offender-Based Tracking System provides electronic transmission of criminal case disposition data from clerks of Superior Court. Legislation passed in 2001 mandated the electronic collection and reporting of final dispositions, and required that clerks of Superior Court provide electronic collection and transmission of disposition data to the Authority. The Authority then transmits the disposition data to the Georgia Crime Information Center (GCIC), a division of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI), where it is used to populate the GBI's Computerized Criminal History Database. The Authority worked with the clerks of Superior Court case management system vendors to develop transmission standards and protocols.

In FY 2020, over **252,000 records** of criminal court dispositions were electronically transmitted from the various criminal courts in Georgia to the GSCCCA and then forwarded to GCIC for the purpose of compiling criminal histories and background checks. This system provides critical and timely information to protect the safety of the public and law enforcement officers throughout Georgia.

Carbon Sequestration Registry

The Georgia legislature passed the "Georgia Carbon Sequestration Registry Act" in 2004 to provide for a registry to promote offsetting reductions in greenhouse gases by sequestering carbon. The Authority

worked with the Georgia Forestry Commission (GFC) to create the Carbon Sequestration Registry which has multiple objectives.

Its primary objective is to promote the establishment and protection/conservation of forests to mitigate the effects of harmful emissions worldwide. Beyond this, a second objective is to create a new medium of exchange and revenue stream for owners of the sequestered carbon. This is accomplished by creating "carbon credits" based on the amount of carbon sequestered. Such credits can be sold to industrial clients who have emission "deficits" because they are producing excessive harmful emissions. On one hand, emission violators can "buy" absolution in the form of credits, and, on the other hand, carbon owners profit from their good work in preserving forests or timberlands.

The registry documents and tracks the acreage of timberland that owners will agree to preserve. Periodic and partial re-inspections ensure that the quantities remain accurate in case of wildfires, storms or other destructive events. Independent inspectors are used to verify the original registration as well as to re-inspect the sequestered timber.

Disaster Planning & Data Archive Initiatives

Serving as custodian of their court's records is one of the most important roles of a Superior Court clerk. With this in mind, the Authority has made supporting clerks in their efforts to protect and preserve their records a priority by offering multiple programs to this end.

One of the many advantages to how the Authority's archive programs and services are managed is in our ability to seamlessly adapt to change. Throughout the recent global health crisis and subsequent recommendations for maintaining safe work environments, the Authority archive operations and services to clerks have remained continuous and uninterrupted because of the commitment of our staff and the ability of our program technologies to support remote operations. Through the use of virtual technology, online training and support have continued without interruption. In addition, program management, field services and communications with clerks have been operating normally in spite of our need to adapt to new business and safety guidelines.

Following is a more detailed review of the Authority's disaster planning and data archive initiatives and the many accomplishments of the past fiscal year.

MyVault Online Archive Program

In 2007, the Authority launched the MyVault Online Archive Program, an enterprise-level data protection service that was created to provide convenience and security for clerks in protecting the irreplaceable public records maintained by their office. MyVault was designed and implemented by the Authority in support of the clerks' ongoing business continuity planning efforts. The intent of the program is to serve as a second line of defense against a data loss event or larger disaster at the courthouse. Enrollment in the program allows clerks to securely protect their real and personal property records, court data, accounting and business records, and general-purpose documents, among others. Safeguarding these records ensures their long-term protection and provides a reliable method for restoring lost data if necessary.

MyVault's two-stage data protection solution offers the convenience of having a local copy stored on site combined with the security of having redundancy on GSCCCA servers at two offsite storage facilities. In addition, the nightly backups are securely managed and monitored daily to ensure that the jobs run smoothly and successfully. The program is designed to meet the needs of all counties of all sizes and with varying levels of IT support and complexity. The MyVault program is currently protecting the electronic records of Georgia's Superior Court clerks in **156 counties**.

The benefits of the program to clerks include:

  ➢ Automated and secure nightly backups
  ➢ Live daily monitoring of jobs and equipment health
  ➢ Customized jobs
  ➢ Local and remote data storage
  ➢ Flexible scheduling
  ➢ Encrypted data transmissions
  ➢ Personalized account management
  ➢ Convenient and quick data restores
  ➢ Secure access to account through online dashboard
  ➢ Storage on dedicated and redundant GSCCCA servers
  ➢ Desktop and rackmount options for the local backup appliance
  ➢ Exceptional customer service

The clerk, as custodian, has the sole authority to decide what should and should not be included in their archive job. However, it is recommended that any sensitive public records or court data that is critical to the operation of the clerk's office or otherwise considered essential should be included. The MyVault appliance can archive any electronic record, as long as it is accessible via the local network. The inclusion of all real estate records was initially required for participation in the archive program; however, the passing of SB 135 (Custodianship Bill) in 2015 defined new backup requirements for the protection of a clerk's electronic records. Enacted as Code Section 15-6-62.1, the amended Act specifies what records must be protected by electronic backups, how the backups must be performed, the number of separate backups, and the frequency in which the backups must occur.

A majority of the data backed up through MyVault is directly related to real estate records. The amount of real estate data backed up from participating counties actually exceeds the amount of real estate data in the GSCCCA search systems. Through MyVault, all real estate data in participating counties can be archived and protected, regardless of filing date.

All participating clerks have access to their vault data through an online dashboard, available at https://vault.gsccca.org, using their password-protected login. The dashboard provides live statistics about the last backup and allows users to view and restore items from their vault as needed. Clerks are also encouraged to contact the Authority for assistance at any time, knowing that MyVault is a managed service and jobs are monitored daily to ensure success.

Each year, annual audit reports are distributed to all clerks enrolled in the MyVault Program. These customized reports contain details about the clerk's archive account, equipment, and nightly job(s). The purpose is to encourage periodic review of the job details (content, data location and scheduling) and ensure that the archive jobs are accurate and reflect the clerk's expectations. Clerks are also encouraged to review the report with their vendors and/or IT personnel to verify that all of the electronic records that the

clerk wants protected are included in the job items noted. In addition to the annual review, audit reports can be generated at any time using the online dashboard or by making a request to the Authority.
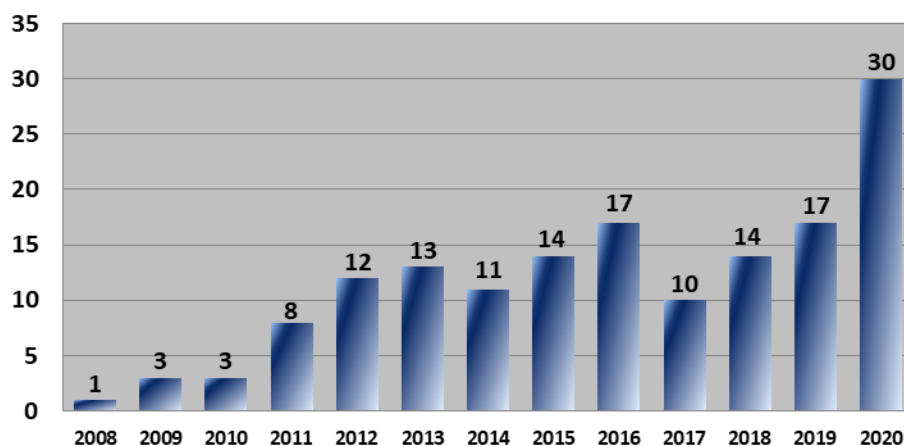
MyVault is currently storing and protecting over **950 million files** totaling more than **157 TBs of live data**, available for recovery in the event of a disaster. The Authority performs proactive data auditing to reduce the amount of redundant data that must be stored. Even as the vault has grown and more new data has been archived, the Authority has been able to proactively and effectively manage storage space and cost. In addition to the 155 TBs of live data (current versions of files), the MyVault system maintains 30 days of previous file versions totaling 22 TBs of additional data stored in the vault.

Through MyVault, the Authority has been able to help counties successfully protect their critical records and resources and safely restore files to an operational state. On average, 10-15 requests to restore data are made per year. Since 2007, MyVault has responded to **153** data loss requests and has restored over **3.5 TBs** of data back to county systems. In FY 2020, the Authority received **30 requests** to restore data, resulting in over **1 TB of data** successfully restored.
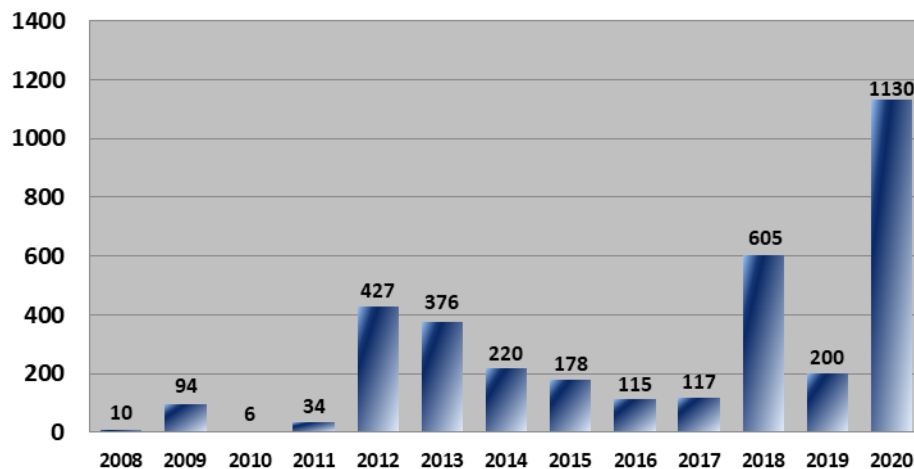
Restores are typically performed directly from the local appliance, which is normally the quickest method. A restore job is initiated and any requested data is restored back to a location on the county network. Small restores can also be performed by the clerk or an authorized user through the online dashboard at https://vault.gsccca.org. As required or in cases of larger volume requests, data can also be restored from the remote vault site(s) and delivered to the county via external media.

Having multiple backups is the best data protection strategy to ensure a good outcome following a data loss event. MyVault provides that second line of defense against a disaster and ensures that a clerk's records are protected on the local archive appliance and on servers in two remote locations in Atlanta and Colorado. By maintaining multiple backups in geographically unique locations, a county can lower its risk of having a catastrophic data loss event due to equipment failure, human error, data corruption, ransomware attacks, or natural disasters.

Number of Restore Requests by Fiscal Year

Volume of Data Restored (in GBs) by Fiscal Year

A bar chart titled "Volume of Data Restored (in GBs) by Fiscal Year" showing the following values by year:

Year	Value
2008	10
2009	94
2010	6
2011	34
2012	427
2013	376
2014	220
2015	178
2016	115
2017	117
2018	605
2019	200
2020	1130

Following are some of the accomplishments of the MyVault Program during FY 2020:

➢ Recognized by the Georgia Historical Records Advisory Council (GHRAC) with the *2019 Award for Excellence in Archival Program Development by a State Agency* for the MyVault Online Archive Program. The award was presented to the Authority in October 2019 at the Outstanding Archives Awards Program, hosted by the GHRAC and held at the Georgia Archives. The awards program recognizes the outstanding contributions of individuals and organizations in archival development in Georgia.

➢ Added 117 million files totaling more than 27 TBs of data to the vault in FY 2020.

➢ Managed, stored and protected the growing number of clerks' digital records, which now exceed 950 million files and 157 TBs of live data in the vault.

➢ Managed 30 restore requests and restored over 1 TB of data back to clerks and/or their vendors in FY 2020.

➢ Added one new county to the MyVault archive program, bringing the total of participating counties to 156.

➢ Issued annual audit reports to all clerks enrolled in the MyVault archive program. This report provides an opportunity to review job details at a glance. Clerks are encouraged to share the information with their IT staff and/or vendors in order to confirm the accuracy of what is being backed up and verify that the data shares included meet SB 135 requirements.

➢ Upgraded archive equipment for 17 counties in FY 2020.

➢ Produced archive initiatives newsletter, *Celebrating Technology in Archiving Records*, that provided a glimpse at the evolving technology in archiving records and shared a chronicle of Georgia courthouse disasters.

➢ Educated new clerks on the history and purpose of the Authority's data archive initiatives at the new clerk training held in August.

➢ Produced and delivered presentation to clerks on *Tools to Strengthen Your Crisis Response* at the winter training held in February. This included sharing strategies for identifying essential records and simulating crisis-response exercises.

➢ Shared information with clerks at several district meetings to review MyVault account features and provide disaster planning guidance.

Following is some of the praise the Authority has received regarding the MyVault program:

> *"Y'all are truly the BEST! I was so worried. Just knowing that I could get this data from you is a relief!!"* – Clerk comment in response to assistance with a restore.
> *"Thank you…you're awesome!"* – Clerk comment in response to a successful restore.
> *"Thanks Tara, you're awesome!"* – Clerk comment in response to the management of equipment upgrade and continuity of service.
> *"Thanks Tara, I really do appreciate it."* – Vendor comment in response to help with a restore.
> *"Thank you so much for your help, Tara!"* – Vendor comment in response to managing multiple point-in-time restores to trace a file for the clerk.
> *"Because we have been stressing backups so much recently, we believe that we are in good shape, in that regard. Still we appreciate very much your offer of assistance. We count you as an asset and part of our team."* – Clerk comment in response to our offer for assistance following a ransomware attack.

Georgia Archives Initiative

In September 2018, the Authority's archive staff broadened its outreach to clerks as part of an ongoing effort to promote the importance of disaster planning. The overall objective of the Georgia Archives Initiative is to provide each clerk with important information about where and how their records are stored so that they can make informed decisions about how best to protect those records. All clerks are encouraged to participate in this initiative and are welcome to do so at any time.

Phase one of this initiative was to survey the clerks' interest in obtaining more information about what they have stored at the Georgia Archives and to help in coordinating that effort. To date, **140 counties** have elected to receive a media holdings list from the Georgia Archives, and these lists have been obtained and delivered back to all participating clerks.

Phase two of this initiative is now underway and involves a more extensive review of the media holdings reported. A combination of manual and automated processes is being used to standardize the reported information into a file for each county. This data will be imported into a database for further analysis as part of the third and final phase. By reviewing and analyzing what records are stored at the Archives, there is a longer-term opportunity to compare that against a) what is stored in the GSCCCA imaging system, and b) what is protected in the GSCCCA vault. In doing so, the goal is to provide each clerk with a comparison report that identifies what (if anything) may NOT be protected, or may ONLY be protected by the Georgia Archives but NOT electronically by the GSCCCA. Equipped with this information, clerks can begin to make more informed decisions about how best to protect those records in the future.

Notary Scanning Project

In 2019, the Authority's archive staff expanded its in-house services and initiated a short-term project for the Notary & Authentications Division that involved the digital scanning of over 260,000 notary certificates. The purpose was to ensure that these paper records are securely stored in a digital form for added long-term protection. This project was recently completed, and these images will now be loaded into the Virtual Microfilm (VMF) system for future viewing.

Virtual Microfilm (VMF) Program

The Virtual Microfilm Program (VMF) is another GSCCCA-sponsored initiative for archiving a Superior Court clerk's digital records and was conceived as an alternative to the traditional microfilm creation process previously provided by the Authority. The VMF Program streamlines the microfilm process and provides an enhanced method for quickly browsing, searching, printing, and downloading microfilm content right on a clerk's PC.

In July 2017, the GSCCCA Board of Directors adopted a resolution to implement a new Image Archive Program upon learning that the statutory requirements for clerks of Superior Court to store deeds and other real estate records had been changed by the legislature. Code Section 36-9-5 previously required that such records be kept in fireproof safes or vaults, in fireproof cabinets, on microfilm or offsite storage within 100 miles of the county. The legislative change authorized a new option to store these documents by electronic means in lieu of microfilm. With an opportunity to advance the technology and provide clerks with a valuable hands-on tool that is consistent with the legislative requirements, the new VMF system was designed and implemented.

The VMF online system provides a more efficient means for accessing archived records in a way that is both practical and meaningful to the clerk. The goal in offering the service is to continue providing clerks more control over the records for which they are custodians, including how they are permanently archived as required by law. This enhanced alternative to traditional microfilm benefits the clerks by providing back-up for important public records in the event of a disaster. Additionally, virtual microfilm technology produces better image quality for viewing and printing while saving time and resources previously spent recalling film/boxes from storage. The VMF system also provides a paperless option for those seeking more environment-friendly business solutions.

Advantages of converting to virtual microfilm are numerous and include:

> ➢ Prevention of record loss
> ➢ Enhanced image quality
> ➢ Easier access to information
> ➢ Greater ability to distribute documents over the internet or by email
> ➢ Reduction in storage space
> ➢ Ability to respond more quickly to customer requests

The initial import of deed images was completed in November 2017, totaling more than 44 million deed images across 67,000 deed books. From 2018 to 2019, another 28 million deed images were imported into the VMF system. As enhancements were made to the VMF application process, liens, plats and historical documents were progressively imported into the system, and in October 2019, the program reached a significant milestone. ALL real estate records ever received by the Authority were loaded and available for viewing in the VMF system. Today, the system stores over **270 million images**, across **475,000 books** totaling over **12 terabytes** of data that is protected and accessible for viewing through the web interface.

All VMF records are securely stored and protected in two geographically diverse, high-security data centers in Georgia and Colorado. Stored digital content cannot be viewed without proper user credentials/authorization. Each clerk has their own secure login for their individual county, which makes it easy for them to access and verify. All counties are automatically enrolled in the VMF Program, and each clerk has an account that gives them access to their VMF records through an online dashboard at

https://vmf.gsccca.org. The dashboard serves as the interface between the clerk and the virtual microfilm content for their county.

Through the VMF online portal, the clerk is empowered, as custodian of the records, to access and view archived records on a self-serve basis. The VMF portal allows the clerk's desktop PC, laptop or mobile device to become a high-performance microfilm reader/printer. To help clerks better understand the Virtual Microfilm Program and its benefits, VMF webinars are offered periodically to demonstrate how to access the VMF website and use its built-in tools along with highlighting the system's features. All 159 counties are able to participate in this free program offered by the Authority. Since the launch of the program, 70 clerks have activated their accounts.

Website functionality continues to be refined with new features being added over time. Search functionality is easy to use and allows the clerk to search for a specific document right down to the page number. Link-sharing is also a useful feature and allows the clerk to quickly collaborate with customers and staff, minimizing cost, time and effort in sharing information. Other features and improvements are ongoing to enhance the user experience.

More clerks and vendors are discovering the benefits of using the VMF system to search and locate images on demand. The discovery of missing images on a clerk server is a common reason for a restore request through MyVault. However, the VMF system is another resource available to clerks for locating missing images. In FY 2020, the VMF system was used to restore over 218,000 images totaling 15 GBs of data back to clerk offices in 8 counties. The biggest advantage to using the VMF system for this purpose is that the images in the system can be easily viewed and downloaded on demand if needed. This free tool is available to all clerks through the VMF portal at https://vmf.gsccca.org.

Current VMF Imaging Totals:

> - Deed Books: 419,661
> - Deed Images: 248,494,324
> - Deed VMF: 45,637
> - Deed Data Stored: 11.3 TBs
> - Lien Books: 43,805
> - Lien Images: 21,888,197
> - Lien VMF: 3,919
> - Lien Data Stored: 681.6 GBs
> - Plat Books: 12,109
> - Plat Images: 1,160,501
> - Plat VMF: 272
> - Plat Data Stored: 211.2 GBs

VMF accomplishments for FY 2020 include:

> - Completed the import of all real estate records ever received by the Authority into the VMF system in October 2019. Currently, all deeds, liens and plats ever received by the Authority are now loaded and available for viewing in the VMF system. This includes all deeds from voluntary or sponsored historical projects. This is the first time that all real estate records ever received by the Authority are directly available to clerks without the clerk having to make a records request or having to search the GSCCCA system. The imaging system is routinely backed up and replicated

offsite to the data center in Atlanta; however, now with the import of this data into VMF, there is added protection with replication to the data center in Colorado.

➢ Imported, on average, between 700,000 to 850,000 new deed images into the VMF system each month.

➢ Conducted multiple VMF webinars and offered a live demonstration on how to access the VMF website, use the built-in tools, and understand the features of the system.

➢ Increased user participation in the VMF Program with activation of 13 additional VMF accounts for a total of 70 participating counties since the program's launch in November 2017.

➢ Educated new clerks on the history and benefits of the VMF program and offered guidance on accessing the online tools.

➢ Managed the restore of over 218,000 images (15 GBs) in 8 counties using the VMF system.

➢ Streamlined the image export/import process which expedites the uploading of new images for viewing.

IT Department

Responsible for the upkeep of our computer and data systems, the IT Department is also the backbone of the Authority…turning legislative mandates and project "dreams" into technological realities. For two and half decades, the Authority's IT staff has developed and implemented cutting-edge programs that offer unique services to Georgia's counties and citizens. The staff is committed to the preservation of the data with which the Authority has been entrusted and ensuring that it is available to the public at all times. Important enhancements and upgrades are made each year to fulfill this commitment. Additionally, the Authority continually seeks ways to increase the speed and improve the efficiency, flexibility, reliability and usability of its systems while also reducing cost. The staff values user/customer feedback and is committed to incorporating it into the Authority's products and technical decisions.

Following is a summary of the many accomplishments of the Authority's IT Department for FY 2020. Whether large or small, these activities enable us to meet our goals and grow and innovate in a constantly changing environment—including a global pandemic that necessitates navigating through uncharted territory.

Development Team – eFiling & eRecording

Over the past fiscal year, the eFile Project has grown both in terms of filers and participating counties. (See Pages 26-28 for more details on the history and growth of this project.) Each year, the Authority tweaks its eFile site in order to incorporate customer feedback, improve the user experience, implement new features, and enhance performance, efficiency and reliability.

Following is data and other information from FY 2020:

➢ UCC eFile –
   o Usage has grown by 57% compared to last fiscal year.
   o 13 new counties were activated for a total of 144 participating counties.
   o 43 of the participating counties – 33 more than last year – only allow the electronic filing of UCCs.

- o 933,923 UCCs have been eFiled through the Authority since its inception in 2009.
  - o 216,615 UCCs were eFiled this fiscal year.
- ➢ Real Estate eRecord –
  - o Usage has grown by 60.5% compared to last fiscal year.
  - o 2,138,765 total real estate documents have been eRecorded since its inception; 1,039,295 of those filings were eRecorded using the Authority's eFile portal.
    - ▪ 1,272,683 total deeds have been eRecorded since inception in 2010.
    - ▪ 448,515 total liens have been eRecorded since inception in 2015.
    - ▪ 86,236 total plats have been eRecorded since inception in 2016.
    - ▪ 331,331 total state tax liens have been eRecorded since inception in 2018.
  - o 907,820 total real estate documents were eRecorded this fiscal year; 345,982 of those filings were eRecorded using the Authority's eFile portal.
    - ▪ 672,686 total deeds were eRecorded this fiscal year.
    - ▪ 177,031 total liens were eRecorded this fiscal year.
    - ▪ 25,475 total plats were eRecorded this fiscal year.
    - ▪ 32,628 total state tax liens were eRecorded this fiscal year.
- ➢ Published the UCC eFile API (application programming interface). This new web API allows filers to submit and pay the Authority directly through their own proprietary software, increasing the efficiency of UCC submission. Additionally, county vendors can utilize the API to accept and reject submitted UCCs, giving counties more flexibility in how they process UCCs.
- ➢ Implemented necessary fee updates to meet requirements of HB 288 which modified filing fees for deeds, liens, plats, and UCCs.
  - o Fee calculations now take into consideration the filer's assigned role to accurately calculate the 2020 updated fees.
  - o Filer role added to real estate packages sent to county vendors to help counties assess correct fees based on new fee schedules.
- ➢ Improved security of eFile and eFile Registry websites by requiring TLS 1.2 on all connections.
- ➢ Improved security of eFile by requiring SSL on all calls to web APIs.
- ➢ Improved the Authority's eAssist application to display and allow users to include estimated fees with the click of a button.
- ➢ Developed UCC auto-numbering process where the Authority will generate File IDs for accepted UCCs for counties who are UCC eFile only and elect to use us as their numbering authority. Through this process, the system automatically assigns the next available UCC financing statement number for counties who participate in UCC eFile allowing a clerk's office to have multiple users processing UCC eFilings simultaneously while preventing duplicate file numbers. The auto-numbering feature also streamlines the process, particularly for high-volume filers who may utilize bulk receipts, and allows these counties to process 1,000 filings on one receipt and be assured that the numbers are all accounted for. Currently, 21 counties have implemented UCC auto-numbering.
- ➢ Improved Escrow management page to dramatically increase performance.
- ➢ Implemented Payment Integrity project to improve processing, tracking and reporting on credit card, ACH and escrow payments.
- ➢ Created automated web testing to make quality control more efficient for future rollouts.
- ➢ Improved the efficiency of the stamping process when accepting UCCs through eFile.
  - o Removed 50-page limit as we can now reliably stamp thousand-page UCCs.
  - o Improved the average processing time from 2 minutes to 22 seconds.
- ➢ Improved customer support by providing CSRs with an eFile user lookup feature.

➢ Added filer's role to eFiling XML sent to counties to allow their systems to accurately calculate filing fees based on the filer's role. This is helpful in cases where certain roles incur filing fees which differ from the flat filing fee.

Development Team – eFile Registry

The eFile Registry was developed by the Authority to facilitate the registration, maintenance and verification of real estate eFile participants. The site provides a secure location for housing approved participants in the eFiling of real estate documents in Georgia. The eFile Registry has been up and running since November 2011.

Following is data and other information from FY 2020:

➢ Improved customer support by providing CSRs with an eFile Registry user lookup feature.
➢ Improved performance and responsiveness of eFile Registry admin module.
➢ Added 3,917 participants to the registry for a total of 11,463 registered participants.
  o 7,004 Self Filers (2,456 added this fiscal year)
  o 845 Submitters (277 added this fiscal year)
  o 3,614 Trusted Users (1,184 added this fiscal year)
➢ Continued to provide the capability for third-party systems to automatically verify the validity of participant ID numbers in real time.
  o Nearly 3.5 million queries processed this fiscal year.
  o Nearly 7.2 million queries processed since the eFile Registry opened in 2011.

Development Team – Website (www.gsccca.org)

With well over a million annual, distinct visitors to www.gsccca.org, the Authority believes that it is critical for its site to be clear, responsive and easy-to-use for its customers, and continues to look at ways to improve the user experience. Following are some of the enhancements made during FY 2020:

➢ Converted all search terminals to the HTML 5 Image viewer which allows the viewer to work with all browsers. Search terminals are installed in all Superior Court clerk offices to allow the public free access to the Authority's statewide indexes.
➢ Improved security by ensuring that all GSCCCA website passwords meet current security guidelines and best practices.
➢ Added logging of customer IP address on image prints to assist in detecting fraudulent account activity.
➢ Re-implemented Google reCaptcha for our login pages to update the technology and to change how the Captcha is presented in order to improve the user experience. A Captcha is a test to tell human and bots apart. It is easy for humans to solve, but hard for "bots" and other malicious software to figure out. Previously, the Captcha was always presented which is considered slightly user-hostile in modern systems. Now, the Captcha only presents and challenges the user on repeated or incorrect login attempts.
➢ Enhanced user login logging to capture more status information during login attempts.
➢ Updated our Rate Limiting system to help prevent automated systems from accessing our system.

- Filmed, edited and published six more "Featured Clerk" videos to our website. The videos use a casual conversation format which highlights each clerk's personality and continues the Authority's goal of making the website more engaging for users while also promoting Superior Court clerks.

Development Team – QA (Quality Assurance)

QA is a quality assurance system created by the Authority to review historical deed, lien and plat transmissions to ensure the data and images conform to Authority requirements. Following are some of the QA improvements made during FY 2020:
- Improved the "Plat QC Completion" and "QC Transmission Instructions" reports.
- Ensured integrity of QA system by flushing unwanted index data.

Development Team – Real Estate

- Developed new RESTFul Image Web API (application programming interface) for transmission of deed, lien and plat images to the Authority. This product is still in testing but will eventually replace our Image FTP process. The new API adds flexibility in image processing to support planned future programs as well as giving vendors additional submission, retrieval and reporting features.
- Extended the index data import service to accommodate page numbers larger than four characters.
- Expanded our Real Estate Property Search to allow counties to opt-in to the search.
- Processed 50 real estate images using On Demand Fast Pass Redaction process and manually reviewed 27 of those images.

Development Team – UCC

- Processed 29,816 UCC images using On Demand Fast Pass Redaction process and manually reviewed 29,813 of those images.
- Developed Electronic Filing Queue report for UCC Intake Desk allowing for real-time viewing of UCC eFiling Queue and resubmission of errors.
- Developed archive procedures for Workflow database resulting in performance improvements.
- Developed Final Transmit system for UCC Intake Desk which allows staff to monitor county final transmit status for a particular day and send automated reminders to counties who need to transmit.
- Improved UCC Tagging Program.
- Moved UCC Indexing to new servers.
- Made improvements to UCC Bulk Image program:
  - Reworked the UCC Bulk Image process to now include digital delivery of the images instead of shipping DVDs.
  - Created a UCC Bulk Image website so that participants can download current and past DVD ISO files.
  - Converted 250 previously created DVD image files to standardized DVD ISO files.

Development Team – Other

- ➢ Managed the "Change Control" document which is used by management and IT staff to track change requests and thoughtfully prioritize development efforts to determine the best use of resources. 56 tracked projects were completed this past fiscal year.
- ➢ Provided alternate check payment processing options to assist customers affected by COVID-19.
- ➢ Updated functionality of mobile application to support iOS version 13.
- ➢ Migrated project management and tracking into ClickUp, a cloud-based project management and collaboration tool that will enable the IT team to better communicate both internally and externally with regard to project status.
- ➢ Initiated project to do a complete rewrite of Fines & Fees system. This upgrade will modernize the technology used to enable the entire program, while adding additional features such as the ability for clerks to fully remit Fines and Fees collections online via ACH.
- ➢ Migrated from Microsoft Team Foundation Server to Azure DevOps for source control and build management.
- ➢ Added two new developers to IT team.
- ➢ Made enhancements to Customer Management Module (CMM):
    - o Improved county invoices by adding the type of invoice (UCC or Notary) to the subject line of invoice.
    - o Added IP address to "Charge Events" view so staff can see customer IP address on image prints and assist with detecting fraudulent activity.
    - o Added customer login history to the customer page for accounting staff to assist with their support needs.
    - o Improved CMM Processing Service.
- ➢ Improved Notary Online:
    - o Added the ability to customize Mail-In Renewal Instructions on Application instruction sheet.
    - o Added the date of the notarial act.
    - o Improved data match accuracy by moving the location of identification number.
- ➢ Ensured continuity of service of Notary & Authentications Division by providing COVID-19 policy and procedures in English and Spanish.
- ➢ Maintained continuity of credit card processing services:
    - o Ensured compliance with CyberSource COF/MIT mandates.
    - o Migrated all systems which process credit cards to new CyberSource APIs.
    - o Implemented credit card branding requirements on our websites.
- ➢ Assisted and tested database upgrades to SQL 2017.
- ➢ Improved Microfilm export performance.

Systems Team

- ➢ Deployed phones, wireless adapters, laptops, desktops, and VPN software to clerks, their staff and the Authority team allowing for a relatively smooth transition to working from home during the pandemic.
- ➢ Implemented a new security system in the office. The improved security enhancements allow for better monitoring and access control to all parts of the primary office and remote warehouse. These enhancements have been immensely useful during the pandemic and have

improved business continuity by enabling the ability to remotely open doors to accept deliveries while keeping the rest of the office closed from the public.

➢ Implemented Mimecast, a cloud-based email security solution, in a continuing effort to protect the Authority and Superior Court clerks against cyberattacks. The program gives users more control over their email; adds anti-spoofing protections; adds URL/link re-writing and scanning to check destination against known bad actors; greatly improves spam detection; moves the bulk of email processing to the cloud; and speeds up automated email processing by 50%.

➢ Upgraded and migrated 180+ reports to a new SQL 2016 Report Server. The previous server was reaching its end of support life and in order to continue receiving the latest security and feature enhancements, the server was migrated to a new platform. SQL Server Reporting Services provide a set of on-premise tools and services that create, deploy, and manage reports. These reports are used throughout the Authority and counties. The ACH eFiling Disbursement, Daily County Disbursement, and Monthly County Disbursement Reports are a few examples of highly accessed reports.

➢ Upgraded and migrated a core SQL Server that hosts our internal application databases to SQL Server 2016. SQL Server is a relational database management system. As a database server, its primary function is to store and retrieve data as requested by other software applications. This server is where many of our critical databases reside. The deployment required extensive database, application, website testing and reconfiguration. This upgrade brought the database to a more current version, which is critical to support, and also gave us access to additional features and functionality.

➢ Upgraded and migrated our core development environment's front-end and back-end SQL servers to SQL 2017. The Development Reporting Services environment was migrated as a part of this process as well. This development server is where all are applications are created and tested. The deployment required extensive database, application, and website testing which is necessary to ensure application compatibility before doing this same upgrade in our staging and production environments. This upgrade is critical to support and also gives us access to additional features and functionality.

➢ Supported developers in the Flat Fees eFile Project. Assisted with database changes and coding solutions. This project significantly changed how we calculate fees for eFiling.

➢ Facilitated the process of improving the eFile system performance through various methods of database optimizations, application and database monitoring and collaboration with the development team. This has led to a better customer experience on the eFile website and less waste of server resources.

➢ Implemented the new database archival solution for the production Workflow database. This process was created to improve execution speeds and experience for the UCC indexers and resulted in overall improvements in access to the Workflow system.

➢ Migrated our UCC Indexing website to a new web platform. This has improved uptime and increased our ability to add security and feature enhancements.

➢ Added improvements to several SQL databases speeding up transactions in many applications including eFile, Fines and Fees, and UCC Indexing.

➢ Replaced the entire Mitel Phone system infrastructure, providing additional and improved functionality to the GSCCCA phone system, including optimized call routing, additional reporting, and an improved caller experience for clerks and internet subscribers.

➢ Upgraded and migrated to a new internal MediaWiki server which allows for centralized and simpler documentation.

- Upgraded and migrated to a new Windows Server Update Services (WSUS) platform. This enables us to continue to reliably install the latest updates and security patches on all server and workstation infrastructure.
- Replaced a shelf of hard drives in our hard disk array since they were nearing their end of life. The hard disk array has 88 hard drives with a total storage capacity of 89 TBs. The storage array handles all of the production data at the Failover Datacenter and is one of the single most important pieces of equipment at the facility.
- Upgraded the operating system on our VMWare ESXi platform. These products allow us to run multiple servers on a shared hardware platform. The effect is that on 12 physical servers, we run 142 virtualized servers. This allows us to maximize utilization of the physical server resources, decreasing server hardware costs.
- Installed all software updates to our SQL database environment. These updates help to improve database performance, reliability, and security.
- Regularly updated reports to keep the subscriber lists current at the counties' requests. For example, there is a Fines and Fees report that is sent out to the counties for daily and month-end disbursement distribution.
- Executed performance analysis on several core databases including Vault, eFiling, Fines and Fees, UCC Indexing, and others, in order to vastly improve query processing times. This effort ultimately resulted in overall improved system speeds.
- Upgraded our antivirus server, Trend Officescan, to a new version. This ensures maximum operating system support and migration.
- Upgraded the software on the WhatsUp and VeeamOne server to better monitor our servers and applications. WhatsUp and VeeamOne specialize in server and application monitoring and improving server availability through detailed reporting and analytics.
- Upgraded the software that runs our backup system. The centralized backup system greatly eases the recovery of data when a loss occurs, narrows backup windows for increased system availability, and simplifies administration.
- Upgraded the Data Replication Server to bolster the process that perfectly synchronizes GSCCCA data between the Primary and Failover Datacenters. Such data replication is critical to ensure that the Failover Datacenter can activate when there is an outage at the Primary Datacenter.
- Upgraded the Search Terminal Management Server. Search terminals are used in Superior Court clerk offices throughout Georgia as a way for the public to access the data at the GSCCCA free of charge. The Search Terminal Management Server restricts access to most functions and websites on the search terminals to ensure that they are only used for their intended purpose.
- Upgraded the Sage Fixed Asset and Depreciation software to ensure continued support and compatibility for the Inventory staff.
- Upgraded the Peachtree Accounting software to ensure continued support and compatibility for the Accounting staff.
- Updated the Windows 10 install that is used in all computers for the GSCCCA to ensure reliability and ease of use for our customers.
- Performed routine mock data restores to test the GSCCCA data backups in the event of an actual data loss. The scale of such tests ranged from individual user files to complete sets of interdependent servers.
- Restored production database backups to ensure their reliability and to increase readiness in case of disaster/emergency. Also restored data to developers to prevent data loss in the production environment.
- Implemented new password policy to ensure that passwords were complex and changed more frequently.

- Implemented LastPass, a password management system. LastPass allows us to encrypt, store, and manage all the accounts used for managing the IT infrastructure and applications.

Systems Team Statistics:

- Have blocked 800,000 pieces of spam and virus laden emails out of 3.4 million inbound emails.
- Total hard drive array storage capacity: 130 TB.
- Backed up an aggregated 942 TBs of data during FY 2020. If this data were transferred to Ultra HD 4K Blu-rays, it would require 9,420 disks, and the resulting stack of movies would be over 40 feet tall.
- Have 85 TBs of backup data on disk. That is equal to 18,085 DVDs, which, if stacked, would be slightly taller than a five-story building.
- Have 700.2 TBs of backup data on tape. Each tape holds up to 6 TBs of data and each tape has 3,149 feet (.6 miles) of tape. The Authority has 150 tapes containing all of our backup data. This amounts to 90 miles of tape.
- Created 103 VPN accounts for clerks and their staff, the majority of those created post COVID-19.

Network Team

- Upgraded 26 county connections. With the proliferation of eFiling and the recent increased need for remote access and VPN, network bandwidth demands continue to increase. The network team has been fortunate with the rise of fiber availability, and can work with any service provider necessary to facilitate the needs of the location.
- Acted as an escalation partner to resolve 215 HelpDesk tickets.
- Supported remote VPN access needs of Authority staff, county users, and vendors.
- Implemented Canary security platform. These devices mimic vulnerable servers on our various public and private networks, effectively acting as a "honey-pot" or "magnet" for malicious traffic.
- Implemented security risk scanning platform, and are using the data gathered to develop and improve our security postures and processes.
- Added data analyst position which has already proven helpful in processing and making useful the large amount of data that gets generated by all of our networking devices and processes.
- Assisted other IT teams (Systems, Development, etc.) by imposing several network scenarios and configurations in order to help isolate and troubleshoot issues or test performance under distinct network conditions.
- Maintained a consolidated list of valid bills for the accounting department to reference. This has enabled us to more accurately track the cancellation of lines, and ensure that internet service providers are billing appropriately.
- Performed infrastructure upgrades necessary for compliance with current and upcoming PCI regulations. The PCI certification guarantees customers that the security measures we provide on the GSCCCA websites are strong enough to protect their data and online transactions.
- Performed the required duties to remain a Cisco Certified Partner.

HelpDesk – Customer Support

HelpDesk is the Authority's customer support team which provides technical support for clerks, their staff, and website customers. This team of CSRs responds to thousands of calls and emails annually, providing support from 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. throughout the work week. Their outstanding work is critical to the continued success of the Authority, and is utilized and appreciated daily by clerks and website customers. See a few recent comments from satisfied users:

> *"I originally called about a problem regarding my account. Andre helped me with the problem and some! He was very patient with me during all my questioning, and inexperience on using your system. He walked me through the system, so I would have a complete understanding. I am sending a big "THANK YOU" to Andre for his patience."*

> *"Success! You went above and beyond my help desk expectations. Thank you very much."*

> *"I had the pleasure of speaking to Andre today. My husband recently passed away. I spoke to Andre concerning a deed on my home. Andre was amazing, kind and professional."*

Over the last decade and a half, the scope of services provided by HelpDesk has more than doubled and the number of monthly subscribers to the Authority's online databases has more than tripled. With this considerable growth and a commitment to maintaining service excellence, the Authority expanded HelpDesk to ensure that clerks, members of their staff, and website customers continue to receive prompt, comprehensive service each and every time they call or email.

With a larger staff, the team also benefits from the added bonus of being able to specialize their support roles. As an example, one CSR has been designated as the eFiling specialist and received additional training to become a subject matter expert on eFiling. Another CSR now serves as an Inventory specialist and has received the training necessary to handle essential inventory functions such as shipping and receiving. This specialization allows for overall increased business continuity, and also allows for more streamlined support as many service calls involve the transfer of equipment through the Inventory Department. Finally, another CSR has become the Network specialist, acting as a precision, first responder to county-related network issues. Having this level of expertise allows problems to be identified and solved quickly, often without the need to escalate the issue to the Network Department. This enhanced, specialized support allows the Authority to more quickly and effectively provide all of its customers with the help and support they need and have come to expect.

In addition to providing specialized support, the Authority also prioritizes the ease and convenience of support to customers by offering three ways of communicating with its experienced team of customer service representatives: calling, emailing or using "Live Chat" for real-time support.

HelpDesk Stats

The following annual statistics speak to the volume of work the Authority's customer support team handles each year and the efficiency of their performance.

- Total Calls: 20,201
- Average Speed of Answer: 35 seconds
- Average Talk Time: 6 minutes 33 seconds
- Total Email Requests Received: 10,300+
- Total Hardware/Repair Requests: 372
- Tickets Received: 16,601
- Tickets Resolved During Initial Contact: 14,760

Top 10 Requests

- eFile Real Estate: Customer Filing Question (2,415)
- GSCCCA Website: Username/Password Request (2,311)
- GSCCCA Website: Site Navigation Assistance (1,048)
- GSCCCA Website: General Information/Non-Tech Q/A (1,012)
- Account Management: New Account Request (562)
- Notary Project: Online Training General Q/A (473)
- eFile UCC: Customer Filing Question (416)
- Outlook: Email Setup Request (322)
- eFile Real Estate: Username/Password Request (308)
- PT-61 Form: General Information/Non-Tech Q/A (299)

Equipment & Software Outreach

In order to successfully implement its many legislatively mandated projects, the Authority helped modernize Superior Court clerk offices in the state by providing thousands of computers, printers, scanners, servers and other equipment. For many offices, this meant automating them for the first time when the UCC project began in 1995. In addition to providing equipment, the Authority's IT staff travels to all 159 counties to service equipment, which is eligible for replacement every three years. By continuing to provide equipment, in addition to technological assistance and high-speed communications, the Authority supports all counties in their efforts to comply with Authority programs. Acquiring this equipment for most counties would not have been possible without the Authority due to the significant tightening of county budgets.

In addition to equipment, the Authority recently launched a program to provide Microsoft Office and Adobe Acrobat to Superior Court clerk offices. Met with tremendous success, this initiative was born from the Authority's strategic planning efforts in 2019. Through that process, the Authority sought feedback from clerks which reflected the need for various pieces of productivity software that had become essential for doing business in the clerk's office. This past spring, the Authority's customer support team

proactively reached out to every county on a one-on-one basis to solicit information about their software needs, and then scheduled a plan to acquire and deploy the software packages.

In addition to providing cutting-edge programs that offer unique services to Georgia's counties and citizens, the Authority can take pride in the fact that Georgia's Superior Court clerk offices have not only entered the 21st century, but have embraced its technology and, in many areas, lead their counterparts from around the country.

Below is a summary of the Authority's equipment and software outreach efforts during FY 2020:

➢ Ordered, processed and shipped a total of **2,096 pieces of new equipment** to clerks' offices including CPUs, monitors, servers, laptops and scanners. Of this total, the Authority deployed **1,512 pieces of new equipment** (922 computers, 232 monitors and 275 scanners) to 50 Superior Court clerk offices to replace depreciated equipment as part of the Authority's Statewide Computer Replacement Project for all 159 counties. The Authority has provided approximately **29,000** pieces of new equipment to clerks' offices since opening its doors in 1995.
➢ Launched program to provide **Microsoft Office** and **Adobe Acrobat** to Superior Court clerk offices. The deployment process is ongoing but by fiscal year-end:
    o 76 acquisition forms had been sent
    o 33 acquisition forms had been received
    o 186 Microsoft Office licenses had been requested
    o 168 Adobe Acrobat licenses had been requested
    o 8 counties had completed installation, with 3 more nearing completion
➢ Handled **234** contracts from counties for additional equipment totaling over $563,000.
➢ Handled **108** purchase orders totaling nearly $1.6 million for equipment purchases for counties and GSCCCA offices.
➢ Handled multiple requests for Acquisition Assistance for county purchases.
➢ Performed detailed evaluation of all returned inventory sheets from counties and processed **155** county equipment returns.
➢ Processed multiple equipment repairs essential for daily operations within clerk offices including computers, flat-panel monitors and scanners. Tracked all repairs and ensured that items were returned in a timely manner.
➢ Shipped approximately **83** non-inventory items including switches, cables, keyboards and mice.
➢ Transferred **410** pieces of equipment to the Georgia Department of Administrative Services for proper disposal per state guidelines.
➢ Continued to promote open communication with counties for the purpose of encouraging compliance with all Authority projects including UCC Project, Real Estate Deed Project, and Lien, Plat & Map Project.
➢ Maintained an inventory management tracking component helping to ensure that all county inquiries, problems and other issues are addressed promptly and accurately.
➢ Distributed inventory sheets, detailed memos and Q&A sheets to all counties for sustained inventory project success.
➢ Continued to streamline and simplify communication between counties and the Authority by providing real-time information on their inventory, GSCCCA equipment policies, and frequently asked questions.

Training

Since the UCC Project launched, training has become one of the Authority's core services and, each year, this critical resource is developed even further. Through this department, the Authority provides the most accurate and current information to clerks, their staff, and other interested constituencies, while also prioritizing the convenience and accessibility of the training. The Authority's goal is to create learning opportunities that are flexible, personalized, and relevant, and, to this end, offers many types of training including classroom, webinars, online, and one-on-one. Each year, the Authority's training program is utilized and appreciated by thousands.

In February of 2019, the Authority launched a new **Learning Management System**, https://eLearn.gsccca.org, which is available to all users. With eLearn, the Authority offers an up-to-date system for clerks and the public to use, while also giving the Authority the flexibility to create and add additional training courses beneficial to clerks' offices in a timely manner. Over 107,000 users have benefitted from accessing eLearn in addition to the Authority's original Learning Management System site, which opened in 2006.

Prioritizing convenience—particularly through remote learning—has always been a key component of the Authority's training goals, but this became an even greater issue with social distancing requirements brought about by COVID-19. With eLearn successfully in place, the Authority was better positioned to quickly respond to the increased need for remote learning this past spring by adding two new online classes. The "Notary Online – Mail-in Renewals" course was developed quickly and added in direct response to the COVID-19 crisis. However, the "GSCCCA Indexing Standards – Common Mistakes" online course had been in the works for the past year in response to one of the priority initiatives—to improve current indexing data quality—set by the Authority Board during their 2019 strategic planning session. To this end, the new course was an opportunity to provide clerks with convenient access to areas where the most common mistakes occur, but was completed and published in the spring to increase the remote training available to clerks and their staff allowing them to continue receiving training while working from home. In addition to offering the new online classes, the Authority also added 14 additional webinars to the training calendar following the "shelter-in-place" order. The additional webinars covered training on the mail-in renewal of notary applications, fines and fees, real estate indexing standards, and UCC eFile.

Throughout FY 2020, the Authority conducted **85** classroom training sessions, webinars and one-on-one programs on various subjects for over **900** participants at **21** different locations around the state. The Authority also trained nearly **14,000** people through its seven online courses.

Following is more detailed information about the Authority's training efforts during FY 2020.

Classroom

Classroom training is usually hosted by a Superior Court clerk and offered free-of-charge. For FY 2020, the Authority conducted 31 programs at 21 locations across the state. The following topics were offered:

➢ Real Estate Indexing Standards
➢ Notary Public Training (over 930 people attended this training)
➢ Fines & Fees

- ➢ UCC eFile Training
- ➢ Real Estate eFile Training

The Authority continues to successfully partner with other groups to conduct some of its training. For example, Fines & Fees training continues to be conducted in conjunction with the Institute of Continuing Judicial Education at UGA for various courts and other groups. The Authority also provided training for government entities including courts and police departments, and provided classes to a variety of groups in the real estate, banking, and legal communities.

Webinars

Webinars are remote training conducted via the internet and phone and allow a clerk to have as many staff members as they wish participate in training without the time and cost of travel. Updated software has streamlined the registration and web-based training process. During FY 2020, the Authority utilized this training tool by hosting 29 webinars covering the following topics:

- ➢ Authority Email & Mimecast (**new training**)
- ➢ Clerk Resource Center & Program Status Report (**new training**)
- ➢ eFile Fee Changes **(new training)**
- ➢ Fines & Fees
- ➢ Pending Lien Search
- ➢ Protective Orders
- ➢ Real Estate Indexing Standards: Introduction
- ➢ Real Estate Indexing Certification Exam: Study Guide
- ➢ Real Estate Indexing Standards: Clerk Questions & Sample Index
- ➢ UCC Training
- ➢ Virtual Microfilm

Online

The Authority currently offers a total of seven online training opportunities after recently publishing two new courses to eLearn. Courses are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, making training completely flexible. Following are the online courses that the Authority offers and the number of clerks, clerk employees, and other Georgia citizens who took advantage of this training during FY 2020:

- ➢ GSCCCA Indexing Standards
   - o 72 clerks, deputy clerks and vendors participated in the training
   - o 31 participants took the Indexing Certification Exam and 20 successfully passed the exam
- ➢ GSCCCA Indexing Standards – Common Mistakes (**new training**)
   - o 23 people participated in the training
- ➢ GSCCCA Indexing Standards – Extended
   - o 54 people participated in the training
- ➢ Introduction to the GSCCCA Fines & Fees
   - o 165 people participated in the training
- ➢ Notary Online – Mail-in Renewals (**new training**)
   - o 58 people participated in the training
- ➢ Notary Public

- o 14,036 people participated in the training
- o 9,180 took the Notary Public Final Exam
- UCC
  - o 39 people participated in the training

Additionally, the Authority conducted 25 one-on-one training sessions for clerks, other courts, banks, and realtors on a variety of topics including UCC and Real Estate eFile, Notary Online, Notary Online Mail-In Renewal, Fines & Fees, eFile Fee Changes, and Bulk Lien eFile. The Authority hosted and participated in the 2019 New Superior Court Clerks' Training, and provided training at the Fall COAG Conference, the Clerks' planning meeting at Brasstown Valley, the Winter Clerk Training in Atlanta, and provided support for alternative training and rescheduling of the 2020 Spring Clerks' Conference in response to COVID-19.

Outreach & Professional Development

The Authority recognizes and values its symbiotic relationship with Superior Court clerks, and in this vein, works hard to provide support to clerks and their staff in many ways. The Authority also seeks and takes advantage of opportunities to reach the public and provide education on who we are and what we do. Additionally, the Authority recognizes the value of professional development and encourages staff to be involved in industry groups and work toward furthering their own training and education. Below is a summary of the Authority's outreach and professional development activities for FY 2020.

- Continually update and add new information to the Clerk Resource Center. This password-protected website was designed by the Authority to support Superior Court clerks and their staffs. The site contains clerk-specific information including program status reports, conference materials, and links to Notary Online, PT-61 Online, and the Authority's Training Center. The site also provides a one-stop location for the Authority to post and for clerks to access updated information on legislative changes and other dynamic issues that will affect Superior Court clerk offices.
- Continued to produce quarterly newsletter for Superior Court clerks that is posted on the Authority website.
- Filmed, edited and published six new "Featured Clerk" videos to website. Using the format of a casual conversation, the videos highlight each clerk's personality and continue the Authority's goal of making the website more engaging for users while also promoting Superior Court clerks.
- Continued to strengthen the Authority's social media presence. By utilizing Facebook and Twitter, the Authority is able to communicate with its customers and reach out to potential subscribers while keeping clerks better informed.
- Handled and processed to resolution UCC, notary public, real estate, fines and fees, and training inquiries from clerks' offices, UCC filers, online users and the general public.
- Hosted and provided training for 2019 New Superior Court Clerks' Training.
- Provided a computer lab for the Fall COAG Conference. Conference materials were posted in the Authority's Clerk Resource Center.
- Visited with clerks of Superior Court across the state and participated in clerk district meetings to discuss joint projects and legislative issues and to promote the benefits of Authority projects

including the Premium Search account, the eFile Project, and disaster planning and data archive initiatives.

➢ Conducted various presentations and training for clerks of Superior Court, other courts, and outside groups including members of the banking, real estate and legal communities.

➢ Communicated quarterly Fines & Fees results with external groups including the Legislative Budget Office, the Senate Budget Office, the Georgia Supreme Court, the Governor's Office, and the Georgia Public Defenders Council. Additionally, monthly Fines & Fees results were submitted to the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council fulfilling statutory reporting requirements for Local Victim Assistance program funds.

➢ Taught 21 Notary Public training classes in 12 locations across the state. Over 930 members of the public attended these classes which were hosted by Superior Court clerks.

➢ Produced archive initiatives newsletter that provided a glimpse of the evolving technology in archiving records and shared a chronicle of Georgia courthouse disasters.

➢ Maintained liaison roles with the State Bar, public users, title examiners, surveyors, GCIC, and courthouse vendors.

➢ Communicated with the FBI's Domestic Terrorism Unit regarding sovereign citizen issues. The Authority serves in a liaison capacity between the FBI and Superior Court clerks.

➢ Fielded questions from law enforcement and offices of the United States Attorneys regarding the UCC filing process.

➢ Handled, in conjunction with the Attorney General's office, open records requests from the public.

➢ Served in an advisory role in the formulation of HB 785 which authorizes remote and electronic notarial acts in the state of Georgia. The bill is currently in committee.

➢ Benefited from having Authority staff involved in state and national industry groups:
   o Authority Communications Director is serving as president of the board of the Notary Public Administrators (NPA) for 2018-2020. Comprised of state notary administrators, the NPA brings together public and private stakeholders in the notary industry. The Authority's participation in NPA allows us to monitor changes and trends in the area of notary law nationally that could affect the state of Georgia. In his role as president, Mike has had the following responsibilities:
      ▪ Presented at the International Association of Commercial Administrators (IACA) 43rd Annual Conference on remote notarization legislative activity across the U.S.
      ▪ Represented the Clerks' Authority at the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) 2020 Winter Conference where he reported on the activities and 2020 goals of NPA, a section of NASS.
      ▪ Set conference agenda for NPA/NASS 2020 summer conference
   o Authority Communications Director is serving as past-president of the International Association of Commercial Administrators (IACA). In this position, Mike represents the Clerks' Authority by promoting the vital role that IACA plays in the UCC filing office. IACA brings together UCC industry representatives from the private (filing parties) and public (filing offices) sectors. As past president, Mike continues to participate in strategic planning meetings for IACA.
   o Authority IT Director was invited to serve on a statewide committee charged by Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice Melton to study and advise the Judicial Branch on the availability and viability of cyber security insurance in response to increasing cyber-attacks across the country and in the state.

Conclusion

Since opening its doors in 1995, the Authority has seen tremendous growth and strategic innovation, and through its many programs, the following has become a reality without any funding from local, state or federal taxes:

➢ The public has unprecedented access to valuable information in the Superior Court clerk's office.
➢ The business community has new, innovative tools for making their work more efficient and effective.
➢ The State of Georgia benefits from more modernized clerk of Superior Court offices.
➢ Clerks' offices enjoy additional resources as budgets are stretched thin.
➢ Georgia lawmakers have access to data that allows them to more effectively set public policy.
➢ Law enforcement officials have access to critical and timely crime data to protect the public.

Although much has been accomplished, our goals remain ambitious and unchanged. We will continue to:

➢ Strengthen our relationship with clerks of Superior Court and ensure they have the resources they need for success.
➢ Sustain our robust culture of innovation by remaining flexible, rethinking how we work, listening to our customers, anticipating shifts in the business environment and meeting them head-on.
➢ Streamline and add value to our programs, and strategically transform our operations for long-term efficiency.
➢ Provide superior customer service to all our constituencies.
➢ Foster existing relationships and partnerships and embrace new opportunities.
➢ Seek sustainable solutions to the financial issues with which we are faced.
➢ Achieve preeminence as an acknowledged leader in the public records arena.

The information contained in this report is respectfully presented to provide an overview of the Georgia Superior Court Clerks' Cooperative Authority and a more detailed review of the many accomplishments of the past fiscal year. These achievements would not have been possible without the support and tremendous contributions of Georgia's Superior Court clerks, the vision and leadership of the Authority Board of Directors, and the outstanding abilities and tireless efforts of our dedicated professional staff.

For additional information on any of the programs listed or the content of this report, please contact Mike Smith, GSCCCA communications director & compliance officer, at mike.smith@gsccca.org.