Lawrence County—South Dakota

USA

Since the 19th century, county offices throughout South Dakota have been the management and storage repositories for vital records. Traditional record keeping processes recorded and archived documents in filing cabinets, storage boxes and binders wherever space could be found. Over time, even the smallest counties have discovered that providing the necessary space for storage, the manpower to file and retrieve records, the efforts to prevent loss of documents and nature's deteriorating effects on paper have created an ever mounting challenge in managing county documents.

Lawrence County, located in the northern Black Hills of South Dakota, began overcoming those challenges when it put its first document imaging system in the Register of Deeds Office in 1997.

"Our microfilm machine was having problems and needed to be replaced," said Gregory Dias, County Computer Systems Director. "We decided at that time that we should pursue an imaging system." Active Data Systems provided Lawrence County with their first document imaging system.

Protecting and Preserving Documents of the Past

Lawrence County was officially organized in April, 1877. Dead wood, home of such historical notables as "Wild Bill" Hickock and Calamity Jane, was eventually named the county seat. Vital county documents, such as deeds, births, deaths, burials, and marriages of infamous and ordinary, dating back over 100 years, require protection and preservation from age related decay, loss, misfiling and natural disaster. "A few years ago a forest fire came within blocks of the court house," said Dias. The county regularly backs up their system and keeps backup copies in a safe offsite location. "Fortunately, it never reached us, but even if the courthouse had burned to the ground our documents would be safe and our history preserved."

Lawrence County Courthouse in Deadwood, South Dakota where document imaging is providing cost savings, productivity and future preparedness for county government

Lawrence County has installed three public access terminals. Said Dias, "This system provides the public easy access and at the same time secures the documents from loss or misplacement."

Creating Efficiencies for Current Operations

Gregory Dias
Lawrence County
Computer Systems
Director

By 1998, the county had upgraded it document imaging and management system to the network level. "This allowed all Register of Deed's staff access to the system and files simultaneously," says Mark McClung, President of Active Data Systems. He added, "It wasn't long until other offices started to come on board." Soon to follow were the State's Attorney's Office, the Auditor's Office, the Office of Equalization and the Sheriff's Department.

Some examples of efficiencies gained by the county document imaging and management:

County Vouchers: The county has scanned vouchers from 2000 and 2001. They plan to scan the rest through current vouchers. Then, once vouchers are approved and signed off they can be destroyed eliminating the need for storage space.

Dias also added that overall automation of the Auditor's office in the last 20 years has allowed them to handle an increased workload while reducing its full-time staff requirements from ten to four. "The digital handling of documents has certainly been a contributing factor."

Criminal Information Jackets At one time the Sheriff's Department had 40 four-drawer filing cabinets to store their criminal jackets. The conversion to imaging made available another 400 square feet of valuable office space and eliminated the need for additional space in the future.

Preparing for the Document Management System of the Future

The ability to have documents in a digital format that can be migrated to the next generation of management tools is critical to the long term solution of the management of county documents.

Tammy Ehnes scans County Assistance information for the Auditor's Office

This was a critical concern of Dias when the county was considering converting from Optika to ScanFile (a more economical, full featured document management system). Said Dias. "We had ADS provide the migration conversion process for us. The process went well and considering what was done, ADS was very reasonable."

The Sheriff's Department decided to install an integrated information management system that combines data from multiple sources including

criminal jacket documents that were being stored in ScanFile. With ScanFile's excellent export functionality built into it Lawrence County was to able to migrate the data to their new system quite effectively. "

The bottom line is the taxpayer benefits greatly from this system in terms of access, cost, the protection of public records and positioning the county for any changes that will come in the future."

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Active Data Systems (ADS) is a Sioux Falls, SD based corporation, with an office in Rapid City, SD, that provides document imaging solutions for government and businesses in a six state area. ADS has been delivering and supporting document imaging consultation, products and services since 1982.

Document Management made easy...