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County clerk finds jury tracking software for a sawbuck

Carmella Sabaugh says other software approached $400,000

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When county Clerk Carmella Sabaugh set out to upgrade her jury selection process, making it more computer friendly, she was initially told the software improvements would cost more

SABAUGH

than $75,000.

The top-of-the-line software available approached $400,000. The high and low price tags were both considered out of reach.

Then the county discovered a software product created by a county in Texas.

The cost? $10.

Travis County, Texas, developed the Web-based computer program for their needs and soon every county in Texas

will put it to work for the circuit court jury selection process. Under a written agreement, Travis County is willing to share their software with any other county in the nation for a $10 fee, as long as the recipient agrees to share any improvements made to the product.

"I think you're going to see a lot more of this, with communities working together ... sharing ideas," Sabaugh said.

Sabaugh's jury clerks handle 19,000 potential jurors each year for circuit court trials.

If the "I-Jury" system works as anticipated, it will allow the clerk's office to

provide assistance for potential jurors online on a 24/7 basis.

The questionnaire for potential jurors could be completed on the clerk's Web site. Seniors over age 70, who are automatically excluded from jury duty, could declare their exemption without relying on the postal service.

Requests to be excused from jury duty due to conflicts could also be taken care of online. And the system could allow those tagged for jury service to work out an acceptable schedule of appearance,

SOFTWARE: Final approval this month

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based on their work days.

The genesis of the new program began in August when an employee in the county's Information Technology Department discovered the Travis County program while searching online.

The Macomb County board's IT Committee approved the purchase this week after a 6-week cost/benefit analysis was conducted. The expenditure still faces final approval from the full board later this month.

Sabaugh was unhappy with the delay but, after testing the product, she hopes to have it in place by April. Chief Circuit Judge Richard Caretti is also supportive of the software improvements.

The county's computer system has long been the subject of criticism by some county departments, and the difficulties encountered by the jury clerks with software called JuryView have been numerous.

For a short-staffed clerk's of-

fice hit by layoffs, the new online program will mean less paperwork, fewer data entries and less mail to handle. The court system will benefit from a streamlined, paperless approach that will help judges track jurors.

Sabaugh said the public, many of whom dread jury duty, will benefit the most.

"We need a new system and this is going to help the public," she said. "It's really a more interactive approach between the juror and our office."