

KEN BURKE

CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT - PINELLAS COUNTY, FLORIDA

Clerk of the County Court • Recorder of Deeds • Clerk and Accountant of the Board of County Commissioners
Custodian of County Funds • County Auditor • Clerk of the Water and Navigation Control Authority

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Legal Self Help Centers to add satellite office in North County

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE –March 11, 2010 – Pinellas County, FL – By providing citizens who represent themselves in court access to affordable attorney services, the Clerk's legal Self Help Centers (SHC) have assisted more than 5,600 citizens in just a little over two years. Beginning April 6, 2010, the Clerk's office will add a satellite office in the North County Branch, 29582 U.S. 19 N., on Tuesdays from 1 p.m. until 4:30 p.m., to make these services more accessible to citizens in the northern part of the County.

"The locations in Clearwater and St. Petersburg have become increasingly busy," said Burke. "A current employee will operate the North County Branch satellite Center during that half day each week. So, we will be able to reach a broader area of Pinellas by shifting our available resources and not creating any new expenses."

The SHC attorneys' fees are not paid at the expense of the taxpayers and do not come out of the Clerk's budget. The affordable, \$1 per minute fees* are used to compensate the attorneys, according to Burke.

The Self Help Centers are the product of a collaborative effort by the Clerk's Office, Sixth Judicial Circuit, Community Law Program and Clearwater Bar Association, created to assist self-represented or pro se litigants with civil court forms. In the areas of family law, landlord-tenant, and small claims related matters, the Clerk may provide ministerial assistance.

"The benefits of the SHC flow both ways, said Burke. "To the self-represented people in need of these services the Centers offer an affordable solution. For the courts bogged down by incorrect pro se filings, the services provided by the SHC help both the Clerk's office and the Courts save time and money by reducing the number of times pro se matters get re-filed due to errors."

Family law issues such as divorces, name changes and adoptions, make up 70 percent of the type of case in which people are seeking help with completing and filing legal forms, according to Burke.

"These types of cases are some of the most emotional, said Burke. "For people who may already be dealing with a lot emotionally, and then are dealing with the confusion of going it alone through the court system, the Centers have been a blessing."

The SHC have received heartfelt recognition from many of the people who otherwise would have not had access to the court system. Examples from the thousands of positive comment cards received include:

- *"During this difficult time of divorce, the staff was wonderful and supporting. I was blessed by their caring attitude and support. They have a difficult position, but helped me get through this difficult time."*
- *"I didn't know about this self help before. This is great. Thanks!"*

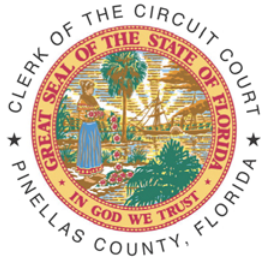
- *"I was better informed upon leaving than I was when I arrived. Everyone was professional. Continue on the path that you are traveling."*

Working with the Hispanic Outreach Center, the Clerk's Office added a Spanish interpreter at the Clearwater Center, 324 N. Ft. Harrison Ave., on Fridays from 8:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m.

*Attorney appointments may be scheduled for a minimum of 15 minutes to a maximum of one hour in 15-minute increments for \$1 per minute. There are no income eligibility requirements. No refunds or rescheduling permitted. Attorneys can not represent customers in court. More information is available at <http://www.mypinellasclerk.org> or 727-464-5150 (Clearwater) or 727-582-7941 (St. Petersburg).

Photo & Caption 1: *The Self Help Centers, created as a resource for citizens who represent themselves in civil court matters, enable citizens to meet with an attorney, review their filings and discuss their case for as little as \$15. Pictured from left are Clerk of the Court Ken Burke, the Sixth Judicial Circuit's Court Administrator Gay Inskip and former Chief Judge Robert Morris.*

Picture available online here: <http://www.pinellasclerk.org/asplnclude2/images/SHC2-1-30-08.jpg>



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SIDEBAR: Florida House Representative Bill Heller extols the public benefits of the Pinellas County Clerk's Self Help Center

While visiting the employees of the Pinellas County Clerk of Court's Office during an In-Service Day held at St. Petersburg College, Representative Bill Heller spoke about how often his office referred citizens to take advantage of the affordable small claims, landlord/tenant and family law legal services offered at the Clerk's Self Help Centers.

"When you think about fifteen dollars for fifteen minutes and the kind of attorneys that practice and help [Self Help Center clients], you can't beat that anywhere," said Rep. Heller.

Calling the program a "tremendous project," Rep. Heller said his office has received letters of thanks from the people referred by his office to the Self Help Centers in Clearwater and St. Petersburg.

"When you think that [the Clerk's Office] did it and [they] did it without State support, that's even more wonderful," said Heller emphasizing the fact that the Clerk Ken Burke's office received no funding from tax payers or the State to establish the legal help centers.

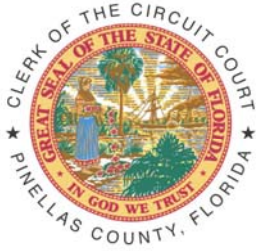
Rep. Heller was among other Florida Legislators who were invited to stop by during the Clerk's Office In-Service Day on Monday, February 15, 2010. Like Heller, Representatives Peter Nehr, Janet Long and Daryl Rouson and Senator Victor Crist, all expressed gratitude toward the Clerk's office for the many duties they perform to serve the citizens of Pinellas County. Heller expressed appreciation of the legal Self Help Centers and the affordable access to Civil Court they help provide.

Caption & Photo 1: ([http://www.pinellasclerk.org/asplnclude2/images/repheller-isd\(1\).jpg](http://www.pinellasclerk.org/asplnclude2/images/repheller-isd(1).jpg)) While visiting the employees of the Pinellas County Clerk of Court's Office during an In-Service Day held at St. Petersburg College, Representative Bill Heller spoke about how often his office referred citizens to take advantage of the affordable small claims, landlord/tenant and family law legal services offered at the Clerk's Self Help Centers.

Caption & Photo 2/3: ([http://www.pinellasclerk.org/asplnclude2/images/repheller-isd\(2\).jpg](http://www.pinellasclerk.org/asplnclude2/images/repheller-isd(2).jpg)) or ([http://www.pinellasclerk.org/asplnclude2/images/repheller-isd\(3\).jpg](http://www.pinellasclerk.org/asplnclude2/images/repheller-isd(3).jpg)) Calling the Self Help Center program a "tremendous project," Rep. Bill Heller said his office has received letters of thanks from the people referred by his office to the Self Help Centers in Clearwater and St. Petersburg.

Or Emphasizing that the Clerk Ken Burke's office received no funding from tax payers or the State to establish the legal help centers, Rep. Bill Heller called the program a "tremendous project."

Caption & Photo 4: ([http://www.pinellasclerk.org/asplnclude2/images/repheller-isd\(4\).jpg](http://www.pinellasclerk.org/asplnclude2/images/repheller-isd(4).jpg)) Representatives Bill Heller, Peter Nehr, Janet Long and Daryl Rouson and Senator Victor Crist, all expressed gratitude toward the Clerk's office for the many duties they perform to serve the citizens of Pinellas County. Heller expressed particular appreciation of the legal Self Help Centers and the affordable access to Civil Court they help provide.



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Clerk's Self Help Centers for affordable legal assistance FACT SHEET

- Since the two Self Help Centers opened on Monday, October 8, 2007, more than 6,000 citizens who represent themselves in court, also known as pro se' litigants, have used the affordable attorney services.
- The Self Help Centers are a collaborative effort of the Clerk's Office, the Sixth Judicial Circuit, the Community Law Program and the Clearwater Bar Association.
- Citizens can schedule an appointment to consult with an attorney for a minimum of 15 minutes to a maximum of one hour in 15-minute increments, at a rate of \$1 (one dollar) per minute.
- **No income eligibility requirements to use the centers.**
- In January 2008, working with the Hispanic Outreach Center, the Clerk's Office added the free services of a Spanish interpreter at the Clearwater Center on Fridays from 8:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m.
- Self Help Centers' brochures are available in English and Spanish.
- Specialized software to assist in filling out eviction, divorce and/or small claims forms is available in the Centers or on the Clerk's website, <http://www.mypinellasclerk.org>, for a fee plus the form-packet fees.
- Citizens may purchase civil court action filing form packets.
- Documents can be notarized and/or copies made for a fee.
- Open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m.
- Two locations: Clearwater Law Library, 324 S. Ft. Harrison Ave., Clearwater 727-464-5150; and St. Petersburg Judicial Building, 545 First Avenue North, St. Petersburg 727-582-7941.
- **A third location will be open on Tuesdays from 1 p.m. until 4:30 p.m., beginning on April 5, 2010.**
- Fees must be paid when an attorney appointment time is scheduled. Online scheduling and payment is available from the Clerk's website, <http://www.mypinellasclerk.org>. Payments may be cash, credit card, check or money order. Refunds will not be issued for missed appointments.
- In May 2008, Clerk Ken Burke was honored by the Community Law Program (CLP) with the CPL Outreach Award for "Providing Self Help Centers to serve Pro Se Litigants in Pinellas County," for his role in the establishment of the legal Self Help Centers.



**Community
Law
Program**



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