



# First in the nation

## Local courtroom first to embrace remote reporting

BY ERIC PETERMANN  
eric.petermann@svherald.com

Cochise County is the first in the country to utilize a new technology that addresses a challenge facing a growing number of trial courtrooms.

Remote court reporting, which allows a stenographer to record court proceedings from a remote location, has been in use at the Bisbee courthouse since May, Superior Court Administrator Eric Silverberg said Tuesday.

The new process solves a continuing "demand and supply" problem, Silverberg said, which has limited the number of stenographers available to cover court proceedings.

### REMOTE: *Pilot program*

FROM PAGE 1

On May 9, the county launched a pilot program to test its remote recording system in Judge Terry Bannon's courtroom. After that effort proved successful, officials agreed to install the system in Judge John Kelleher's courtroom, which is currently being completed.

Last week Silverberg traveled to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where Cochise County received an award for successfully implementing the system from the National Association for Court Management. The organization has more than 1,700 members from the United States, Canada, Australia, and other countries.

"We're the first trial courtroom in the country to do this," Silverberg said. "We are the pioneers."

The only other location where this technology is being employed is at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where the U.S. military is utilizing remote stenographers for its tribunals.

The technology has a growing appeal across the United States, he said, and several other courts in Arizona and elsewhere are beginning to "come on board."

With fewer schools offering stenography courses and fewer people learning the skill, Silverberg said the number of certified recorders available to cover court proceedings has dwindled in recent years.

"Fifteen years ago, there were five schools in Arizona that were training people in how to become a court stenographer, and today that number is down to one community college in the Phoenix area," he said.

Cochise County currently has 4.4 stenographer positions to cover its six courtrooms. While not all proceedings require the services of a recorder, Silverberg said the county has had to delay hearings when its own stenographers, or temporary certified recorders, are not available.



LISA MARRA, COCHISE COUNTY COMMUNICATIONS ADMINISTRATOR PHOTO

Cochise County Supervisors, from left, Chairman Richard Searle, Pat Call and Ann English were joined by Cochise County Superior Court Administrator Eric Silverberg, second from the right, after receiving an award from the National Association of Court Management. The national award was presented last week at the organization's convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to recognize the county's establishment of a remote recording system for its courtrooms.

It's the same challenge for courts all over the country.

"There has been a disconnect between the demand for this service and the supply of people who have the skills and are certified to do it," he said.

Silverberg said it took about two years to identify a solution to the problem. After locating possible vendors, he prepared a Request for Proposal and presented his findings to the county procurement department. One vendor, RevoText, offered everything the county needed and provided a demonstration of its equipment for Superior Court judges. Silverberg credited both the judges and the Cochise County Board of Supervisors for their support of the new system.

Supervisors approved funding for the project in the 2015-16 budget.

Remote court reporting required installing a dedicated high-speed Internet connection at the more than 100-year old courthouse, along with equipping the courtroom with small cameras, speakers and microphones.

A stenographer at a remote location can see and hear the entire court proceedings. They also wear a headset that allows them to respond to questions and read back testimony over a speaker in the courtroom.

Judge Bannon has an iPad available at her bench, which shows what the stenographer is typing as the court proceedings unfold.

Silverberg said the system saves what it is recording and the stenographer's transcript to three separate areas, including the law firm for the defense attorney, a "cloud-based" server provided by the vendor and by the equipment being used by the stenographer at the remote location.

"Overall, we're very pleased," Silverberg said. "We've been able to use this system as an adjunct to our court reporting staff, to fill in what we can't cover otherwise. It's proven to be a very cost-effective system."

Judge Kelleher's courtroom should be set up by next month, Silverberg said.