

Local news

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● Kankakee County

County launches legal self-help center

Will help low-income people represent themselves in civil cases

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The corridors of justice in Kankakee County just got a bit easier to navigate for individuals who are representing themselves in court without a lawyer.

The Legal Self-Help Center was launched Thursday. The Internet-based center will allow people to research the law and prepare their civil cases for court. The center provides legal forms, instructional videos and other information to assist self-represented litigants with civil legal affairs.

The center is targeted at lower-income individuals.

"One of county government's most important roles is to help the citizens who are most vulnerable," County Board member Sam Nicholas said

when the center was unveiled to the media Thursday. He was on the committee that established the self-help center.

While the center is aimed at lower-income users, anyone can log on to the Web site or use the four especially designated computers that have been provided at the courthouse in rooms 105 and 208, and at the Kankakee Public Library. The Web site is kankakee.illinoislegalaid.org. Facilitators will be available at the courthouse and library to help users maneuver through the Web site.

The center's goal is to make the courts more accessible to the public and to make the justice system available to everyone regardless of their income level, Chief Judge Clark Erickson said.

"While we encourage all litigants to seek the assistance of an attorney in handling their legal problems, the reality today is that many people are reluctantly coming into court without an attorney and attempting to represent themselves, often with inadequate information about the



WHERE: Legal Self-Help Center, Kankakee County Courthouse, Rooms 105, 208

HOURS: 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

WEB ADDRESS: kankakee.illinoislegalaid.org

ADDITIONAL INFO: Internet access also available at Kankakee Public Library, 200 E. Court St., (815) 939-4564

law and how to proceed in court," Erickson said.

Funding for the center was obtained by Prairie State Legal Services with a \$13,980 grant from the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation.

Internet users who log on to the Web site will be greeted with an introductory video of Erickson. Users can type in a search for information on whatever legal subject they need. They can also click on topics such as how to get a divorce, how to expunge criminal records, how to modify child support payments and how to protect themselves and their children from

domestic violence.

Illinois Legal Aid Online maintains the database.

"This does not replace attorneys," noted Joseph Dailing, executive director of the Illinois Coalition for Equal Justice.

Kankakee County's program is the fifth launched in Illinois this year, Dailing said.

"Legal self-help centers have been established in many states across the country to deal with the increasing number of self-represented litigants who are coming into the court often unprepared to present their case," Dailing said.