



MELISSA WILK

ALAMEDA COUNTY AUDITOR-CONTROLLER/CLERK-RECORDER

September 2021 Newsletter

Message from Melissa

Dear Alameda County,

I hope this Newsletter finds you and your families doing well as we ease into a busy autumn with students heading back to the classroom and many resuming their commutes to the workplace.

As mentioned in last month's Newsletter, we were able to open our main Clerk-Recorder's Office to the public in June where our dedicated staff have been working tirelessly to meet the needs of the *tens of thousands of customers* who have visited us this summer.

Our other Auditor-Controller/Clerk-Recorder offices were able to remain open for "business as usual," and in this Newsletter I am proud to highlight further examples of how my diligent and professional staff have been working hard to serve you, including:

- Earlier this summer, we helped cities all over Alameda County **recoup millions of taxpayer dollars** that may have otherwise been lost;
- Over the past several weeks, **we have received national awards** for our accounting transparency and excellence, as well as our innovations in creating virtual marriage services and building an online portal to search for property tax refunds; and
- Continuing our efforts to make it easier to **help wildfire victims replace vital records**.

Also in last month's Newsletter I talked about what a privilege it is to participate in the Hayward Adult School Raising Leaders youth internship program. I hope you will enjoy the article below about just one of the program's inspirational students who recently interned with my Office. Her hard work and contributions were invaluable to our customers, and were greatly appreciated by all of her co-workers at the Clerk-Recorder's Office.

As always, please do not hesitate to reach out with any suggestions on how we can serve you better.

Have a Happy September!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Melissa Wilk".

P.S. [Follow me on Twitter](#) to get an early heads up on all of our latest services. Tweet me to suggest future topics that you'd like me to cover!



Wildfire Emergency Proclamations: Replace your Vital Records for FREE



This year has already been a devastating fire season for California with more than 7,000 fires having burned over 2 million acres in our state. For many fire victims, the difficult process of recovery often includes replacing vital documents that were lost in the fire. *We can help.*

The Governor has made several emergency proclamations to help victims of these fires (see *the partial list of fires in the right hand column*). If you've been affected by these fires and lost your birth, marriage, or death certificates, we can help you replace those documents for **FREE** if they are stored with Alameda County's Clerk-Recorder's Office. **Start by clicking on the name of the fire that has impacted you.**

Call us at **(510) 272-6362** and we'll be happy to help you during this difficult time. If you don't know which county is storing your records, contact the California Department of Public Health at **(916) 552-8116** or visit their vital records webpage [here](#).

The status of emergency proclamations and affected counties can change. Please [click here](#) for the most current emergency declarations and the affected counties.

We are here to help, so please don't hesitate to reach out!

Emergency Proclamations: Fires & Affected Counties

Antelope Fire:

- Siskiyou County

Cache Fire:

- Lake County

Caldor Fire:

- Alpine County
- Amador County
- El Dorado County
- Placer County

Dixie/McFarland/Monument Fires:

- Shasta County
- Trinity County
- Tehama County

Dixie/Fly/Tamarack Fires:

- Butte County
- Lassen County
- Plumas County

River Fire:

- Nevada County
- Placer County



For the 38th year in a row, the Alameda County Auditor-Controller was awarded the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) Achievement of Excellence Award for our financial reporting.

According to GFOA, "the Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management."

The award was judged by an impartial panel based on our [Fiscal Year 2019-2020 annual comprehensive financial report](#). Criteria for the award included demonstrating a constructive "spirit of full disclosure" to clearly communicate its financial story and motivate potential users and user groups to read the report."



This year, the Center for Digital Government (CDG) bestowed, not just one, but *two* GovX awards to Alameda County's Auditor-Controller/Clerk-Recorder! The awards celebrate achievements and best practices from government agencies and departments that have radically improved upon the experience of government and push the boundaries of how services are delivered.

One award recognized our creation of the [first virtual marriage program in California](#) to issue marriage licenses and perform wedding ceremonies during the COVID-19 shelter-in-place order. Our virtual marriage ceremony is both fully paperless and completely online. Read more about it [here](#).

CDG also awarded us for the **Property Tax Refunds Tracking System** which provides a new, automated service to Alameda County residents to check their refund status. To check the status of your property tax refund, just enter your information [here](#).

Special Report: Auditor-Controller/Clerk-Recorder Rescues \$2.8M for Taxpayers, Cities, and County



In May 2021, when \$2.8 million in transfer tax payments all over Alameda County were not made by the responsible outside party, our Consolidated Accounting Unit (in the Office of the Auditor-Controller/Clerk-Recorder) put in the hard work needed to recoup more than 99% of the funds. (From left: Michael Brown, Divina

If you have ever bought a home, you likely remember the stressful process of closing escrow. After signing mountains of paperwork, most of us naturally assume that all required transfer taxes have been paid. But in May 2021, that didn't happen for 150 property transfers in Alameda County.

When the third-party company that was responsible for making these transfer tax payments was unable to do so, \$2.8 million in transfer tax payments on property purchases across Alameda County went unpaid.

"The County and our cities rely on these funds to pay for vital services that directly benefit communities and families, so we had to do everything in our power to recover those funds," said Melissa Wilk. "After we discovered the problem, we quickly informed city finance directors of the situation and they fully supported our efforts to recoup the money."

So far, the Auditor-Controller/Clerk-Recorder has recovered 99% of these funds.

"I was very impressed by the prompt and proactive actions taken by the County Auditor-Controller/Clerk-Recorder to collect the funds," said City of San Leandro's Finance Director Susan Hsieh. She added, "Melissa Wilk's staff was extremely helpful in providing important updates to the cities, and their efforts were greatly appreciated."

Melissa Wilk has been quick to redirect the praise to the Alameda County Counsel staff, her own staff, and the companies that helped to resolve this issue. "Without all of us working together, it would have been much harder," said Melissa. "I'm particularly proud of the vigilance and dedication of our Consolidated Accounting Unit -- Divina Villanueva, Vanessa Ramirez and Michael Brown -- who were directly responsible for meeting this challenge."

We are not done just yet though, we've only recovered 99% of what we're owed. We won't be satisfied until we get back every last penny."

Save Time & Order Online!

Why wait *in line* when you can get what you need *online*?! If you're looking for a birth, death, or marriage certificate, or copy of an official record you can order these documents without having to make a trip to our Office. [Just click here](#) to view and access these online services at your convenience!

Once you've submitted an order, you can check the status of your request at any time online. You can select to have the document mailed to you or ready for your pick-up at our Office.

Select our *pick-up option* and we can turn around your order in 1-2 business days. It's just that easy! [Click here](#) to get started.

Ordering Copies of Alameda County Vital Records



[Click here for birth certificates](#)

[Click here for marriage certificates](#)

[Click here for death certificates](#)

[Click here to search or order official records](#)

Raising Leaders, Lasting Impact ***Meet Josefina Carranza, Intern Extraordinaire***



Josefina Carranza started her internship at the Clerk-Recorder's Office eager for an opportunity to show what she could do.

"I felt stuck at my other job," she said. "I knew I wanted to do more."

Josefina found that opportunity in our Customer Service department, where she helped customers navigate complex issues including searching for birth certificates to filing fictitious business names. She said the key to meeting some of the challenges she encountered was drawing from her own life experience, especially when trying to help customers who spoke limited English.

"I would picture how I would help my parents," said Josefina. "I just make the customers feel welcome and talk to them like they're part of my family."

"That was the past. Focus on the future."

Overcoming challenges is nothing new for Josefina Carranza. She was selected to intern at the Clerk-Recorder's Office through the *Raising Leaders* program, which provides at-promise young adults in Alameda County the chance to gain valuable experience and skills working at a government agency. Josefina once thought school wasn't for her, but worked hard and earned her high school diploma earlier this year. Josefina said that advice she picked up through *Raising Leaders* keeps her moving forward, "That was the past. Focus on the future."

Josefina has left a lasting impact following her eight weeks with us at the Clerk-Recorder's Office. During her time here, among other things, Josefina translated into Spanish an array of marriage service instructions. Now, thanks to Josefina, those translated instructions will soon be available to all of our Spanish-speaking communities and customers.

Josefina expressed being both grateful and humbled for the opportunity to spread her wings. She plans to continue her studies at Chabot College to become an entrepreneur or perhaps return to Alameda County to help more people. While she's not quite sure what she'll do in the long run, Josefina was already nostalgic about her experience with us, "There are valuable things I learned here, not just skills and experience, but life lessons that I'll always take with me for the rest of my life."

Community Spotlight: Daily Bowl, Fremont



Above: Daily Bowl Board Members

Upstart Non-Profit Celebrates 5th Anniversary, Recovers Millions of Pounds of Food for Food Insecure

Since 2016, Daily Bowl has helped feed thousands of East Bay's families by diverting 4 MILLION pounds of edible food otherwise destined for landfills. This young and growing organization recently celebrated their fifth anniversary at the beautiful Ardenwood Historic Farms in Fremont.

[Daily Bowl](#) recovers edible, fresh and prepared food from food providers all over the Bay Area to deliver nutritious, tasty meals to a network of food banks, social service agencies, soup kitchens, and places of worship to distribute to individuals and families in need.

Sadly, 30% of families in our local communities experience hunger, and 40% of edible, fresh food goes to waste every day. Daily Bowl is working to bridge the gap between the thousands of food insecure families in our communities with the region's vibrant and thriving food economy.

Daily Bowl works within an ecosystem of organizations in the "circular food economy" that multiplies the impact of their work. For example, rescuing food not only feeds the food insecure, it also mitigates the negative impact on our environment by reducing food waste. After the food is rescued, Daily Bowl works with organizations like ALL IN Eats that provides low-income entrepreneurial chefs an incubator to cook delicious and nutritious meals using the rescued food. Many of these meals are then prescribed to and consumed by vulnerable populations with various health ailments, and the nutrition-rich meals help them in their recovery.

"20% of kids in Alameda County are food insecure, but 40% of edible food is wasted in the U.S. every day," said Daily Bowl Co-founder and President Lance Nishihira. He emphasized this point not only to show the magnitude of the problem, but to also offer hope that the solution is right at our fingertips, and perhaps, at the end of our forks.

To learn more about Daily Bowl click [here](#).

STAY IN TOUCH

Keep up-to-date on important information from the Office of the Auditor-Controller/Clerk-Recorder by following Melissa on Twitter ([@MelissaWilkACCR](#)).

If this email was forwarded to you, subscribe to our newsletter by emailing us at ACCR.info@acgov.org.



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