

Title: **Clerk of Court's office**  
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# COURTHOUSE SPOTLIGHT

## Clerk of Court's office

BY BETHANY CARSON

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If you're headed to the Butler County Clerk of Court's office, chances are, you haven't had a good day. You may be there for a divorce, for a traffic citation, small claims, civil, or criminal case, a mental health or substance abuse committal or for a protective order in a case of domestic abuse. Maybe you're serving jury duty or working on a trust or guardian-ship matter.

Whatever the case, Clerk of Court Julie Kneip, Judicial Specialist III Megan Buhrow and Judicial Specialist II Terri Halbach are there to provide the resources you need and to try to make your day a little brighter.

"In today's society, people are not always friendly, welcoming and helpful..." Halbach said. "[I find satisfaction] in seeing people get the resources and help they need."

The Clerk of Court is a state office, and duties of the office are outlined in Iowa Code. Duties include jury management, maintaining and processing court records, processing traffic citations, non-scheduled traffic violations, magistrate matters, protective orders, criminal complaints and juvenile, small claims, civil, mental health, domestic abuse and substance abuse cases, guardianships, as well as mental health and substance abuse committals.

People often visit the Clerk's office with questions on filing for small claims court or divorce.

Butler, Franklin, Bremer and Floyd County offices work as a team under Clerk Julie Kneip. While Bremer and Floyd Counties each have four-per-

son staffs, Butler and Franklin Counties have two judicial specialists each and approach their work with a divide and conquer method. Each member of the team has a different expertise.

"We all do the same type of work, but all specialize in different things," Buhrow said.

For example, while Franklin County team members specialize in processing divorces and civil cases, Butler County judicial specialists have expertise in small claims, probates and mental health. Team members help those who visit each office to the best of their ability. If one doesn't have the answer, another will.

They assist with finding and e-filing forms, do case processing, and work closely with attorneys as wills and guardianships are set up. Many self-represented (pro-se) individuals also visit the clerk's office to ask questions. While the clerk's office cannot give legal advice, they answer questions about the procedure and process with easy-to-understand terminology, not legal jargon.

If they don't have the answer, they set visitors on the right path to finding the help they need by getting them in touch with an attorney, Iowa Legal Aid, or other services and resources.

"We do have a website, [www.iowacourts.gov](http://www.iowacourts.gov), that is a wonderful resource. ... You can pay fines, do court record searches, or search anything on public record. There are instructions on how to represent yourself in court," Buhrow said.

There are also various forms available if you would like a

judge to, say, give a presentation at a school classroom.

Court is held every other Monday, every Tuesday morning, and all day on Wednesdays, as well as occasionally on Tuesdays. A bailiff from the Sheriff's office checks in anyone who comes for court.

"We take fines, calculate costs ... and try to answer questions. When they're in the courtroom, it can be intimidating, so we try to help them understand what it means ... if they have to come for a court date, pay a fine or serve jail time," Buhrow said. "We help break it down."

And the Clerk of Court's office brings a wealth of experience and expertise. Kneip

began working part time at the Bremer County Clerk of Court's office in 1991 after earning a paralegal degree. Eventually she moved on to full-time status while at the same time working on a bachelor's degree in history from UNI.

In 2005, she went back to school and earned her Master's degree in mental health counseling. While continuing to work for the clerk's office, she owned her own counseling business until retiring in 2012 to work full time as Clerk of Court for Bremer and Floyd Counties. She spends her spare time mental health counseling at Monarch Therapy. In July 2016, she started work as Clerk of Court for Butler and Franklin counties as well.

As clerk, she serves in Des Moines on the Rural Courts Initiative Committee and a committee working to improve educational opportunities for

judicial specialists.

"I'm really enthusiastic about ensuring team members get the training they need to be comfortable in their jobs," Kneip said. "That's probably my highest priority, ... and I enjoy the teamwork with great people."

She oversees the calendar for staffing purposes at all four offices and supervises the workload queue to make sure court records are processed in a timely manner, as required by law, in the four counties. She ensures emergencies are handled and takes care of financial responsibilities, managing all audits. She also makes sure her own staff members have proper training in the areas needed.

"She makes sure to have one-on-ones with each employee to help make sure they hit their goals," Buhrow said. "We set goals every year, and she makes sure we're not just successful here but all-around."

Buhrow graduated from Wartburg in 2016 with a history degree and started working at the Clerk's office in Sept. 2016. She originally worked part-time in Butler and Floyd counties and travelled between the two. In June 2017, she started full time in Butler County.

"I personally enjoy working with clients and making sure they leave here feeling helped," Buhrow said.

Halbach graduated from UNI with a criminology degree in 2004 and worked in the mental health field for about 10 years as an advocate. Then she did advocacy work for domestic abuse and homicide survivors for two years before she started

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working at the clerk's office.

"She's a wonderful resource and helps us get resources for people in domestic violence situations. ... She can get contact information for places and people and reach out to services they're entitled to as victims," Buhrow said.

Halbach's goal is to make someone's day better, regardless of what they are facing. Kneip knows what tough times look like.

"[I enjoy] making a difference in other people's lives,"

Kneip said. "One of the important things we do in this office is the committal process. I know firsthand how important that is, as I lost my father to suicide when I was younger, and that had a major impact on our family. I've seen what it has been like to be on the other side as a family going through this, and when they come in, I've walked in their shoes."

Working in Butler County, the ladies enjoy the small-town environment, and the willingness of neighbors to help each

other.

"Butler County is very welcoming. I walked in with an armload ... The auditor opened the door. Donis [Dralle] got me upstairs, and Megan got me in," Kneip said. "Kindness and helpfulness is ever present here. I never feel people are not willing to assist if there's a need."

Continuing that tradition, the clerk's office is there to help the citizens of Butler County.

"Many don't understand how many facets of people's lives we're involved with: if you're

adopted, have a traffic ticket, a kid in trouble, a divorce, pay child support or serve jury duty—we touch people's lives in many different ways," Halbach said.

Their goal is simple. "We desire to help people," Kneip said.



Megan Buhrow, Julie Kneip and Terri Halbach serve Butler County at the Clerk of Court's office. (Bethany Carson photo)