



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

SARASOTA COUNTY

KAREN E. RUSHING

Clerk of the Circuit Court
and County Comptroller

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and County Comptroller



I am pleased to present to you the Annual Report of the Sarasota County Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller for the fiscal year ended September 30, 2023.

By authority of the Constitution of the State of Florida, and the laws enacted by the state legislature, this office is responsible for providing a myriad of services.

A continued focus this year has been on public safety through fraud prevention in the areas of management of the county treasury and accounts, documenting ownership of land, entitlement to financial distributions, and supporting the Judges in both the Circuit and County courts. Court documents are governed by the Rules of Court and redaction of personal information from court documents is performed by this office. In 2023, this office reviewed 1,556,420 document pages for redaction of personal information to ensure confidentiality requirements are met.

The resident population of Sarasota County is approximately 464,223, an increase of 2.6 percent from last year. It includes Unincorporated Sarasota County (pop. 288,097) and four municipalities: the cities of Sarasota (pop. 57,005), Venice (pop. 27,793), North Port (pop. 86,552) and the Town of Longboat Key (pop. 4,776). The jurisdiction for the circuit and county court matters includes not only the unincorporated county but all the municipalities.

As the County grows so do the complexities of maintaining the Court's records, the transfers of property ownership, and management of a \$1.5 billion investment portfolio. Our investment portfolio is rated by Fitch Ratings, one of the big three credit rating agencies, and is tiered with layers of safeguards along with a formal investment policy and required diversification. At the top of our priority list these days is fraud awareness and how to protect this office from fraudsters that seek out large organizations such as the Clerk and Comptroller to perpetrate complex fraud schemes. Our team works diligently to keep one step ahead of them by detection and eradication of fraud attempts. Our Office of the Inspector General focuses on compliance issues and fraud waste and abuse within the county. It is also a part of a statewide alliance that investigates guardianship fraud.

Some of our fraud prevention efforts include an application for property transfers that notify residents, who sign up to use the application, should a bad actor try to fraudulently transfer real property; enhanced banking arrangements to prevent the cashing of forged checks; Clerk and Comptroller alerts on our website of jury scams, and working closely with the Sheriff with regards to suspicious activity.

As a steward of public service, I am deeply committed to doing our part in supporting the citizens of Sarasota County and the state of Florida. Last year, we partnered with the Florida Attorney General, Ashley B. Mooney, to raise awareness and reduce human trafficking in our region. By joining leading organizations, businesses, and government agencies in the 100 Percent Club, we are training all employees in the office to learn the vital signs of human trafficking and to act as needed to minimize this threat in our community.

As we embark on a new fiscal year, our efforts will be focused on continuing to provide excellent service and enhanced and convenient access to information.

Sincerely,



Karen E. Rushing

Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller



SARASOTA COUNTY COURTHOUSE

THE 1927 SARASOTA COUNTY COURTHOUSE WAS DESIGNED BY ARCHITECT JAMES W. WELLS AND BUILT BY THE COUNTY OF SARASOTA. THE COURTHOUSE IS A BEAUTIFUL EXAMPLE OF THE ARCADE ARCHITECTURE OF THE 1920S. THE TOWER IS THE MOST DISTINGUISHING FEATURE OF THE BUILDING. THE COURTHOUSE IS A HISTORIC MONUMENT TO THE COURTHOUSE ARCHITECTURE OF THE 1920S.

1927
SARASOTA COUNTY
COURTHOUSE



FCCC FLORIDA COURT CLERKS AND COMPTROLLERS

2011 Special Recognition Award
2010 Excellence in Leadership Award
2009-2018, Chair, Legislative Committee
2008-2009 Chair, Strategic Planning Committee
2007-2008 President
2005, 2009, 2012 and 2013 Clerk of the Year
2022, 2023 Excellence in Best Practices

CCOC FLORIDA CLERKS OF COURT OPERATIONS CORPORATION

2014 Legislative Committee
2014 Florida Courts E-Filing Committee
2011 Co-Chair, Revenue Stabilization Workgroup

REPUBLICAN PARTY OF SARASOTA, FLORIDA

2007 Statesman of the Year

UNITED WAY OF SARASOTA COUNTY

Member, Board of Directors

29TH ANNUAL WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

2013 Women of Light Award

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

2000 Distinguished Alumni Award

FLORIDA SUPREME COURT – FLORIDA COURTS TECHNOLOGY COMMISSION (FCTC)

2010-present, Florida Courts Technology Commission
2003-present, Committee for Electronic Filing

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

2002-2007 Advisor, Commercial Law Department

ACHIEVEMENTS

GOVERNMENT FINANCE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

2020, 2021 Triple Crown Medallion Award
2012-present, Outstanding Achievement in Popular Annual Financial Reporting
1984-present, Excellence in Financial Reporting Award

ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC TREASURERS OF THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

2014, 2018 Certificate of Excellence for Sarasota County's Investment Policy

UNITED WAY SUNCOAST

2017, 2018 Top 25 Most Generous Workplaces, Sarasota Area

FLORIDA GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS ASSOCIATION

2009-Crystal Award, Online Foreclosures
2008 Second Place Crystal, Annual Report
2007-2009 Special Judges Awards

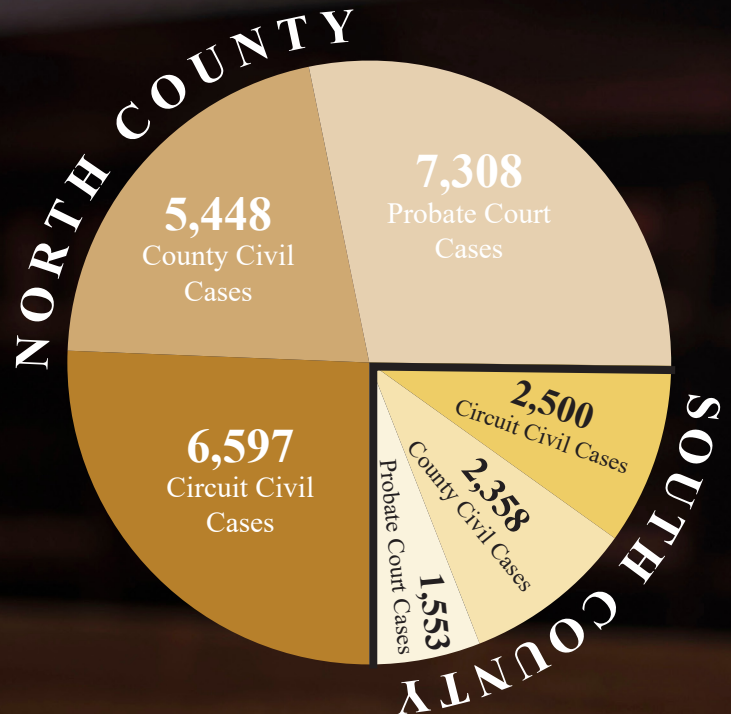
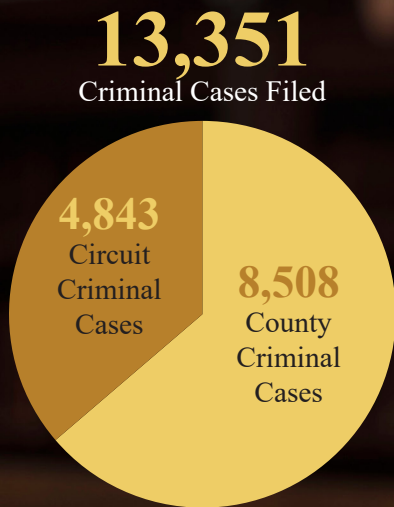
ASSOCIATION OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS

2009 Gold Winner, MarCom Award, Annual Report
2009 Honorable Mention, MarCom Award, Photography

CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT AND COUNTY COURTS

The Clerk of the Circuit and County Courts is an independent elected official responsible for many court related activities. The Florida court system consists of the Florida Supreme Court, six District Courts of Appeal, 20 Circuit Courts, and 67 County Courts. Sarasota is one of three counties in the Twelfth Judicial Circuit, which also includes Manatee and DeSoto counties. Serving as Clerk to both the circuit and county courts, trial court records are maintained in an electronic manner and data sharing of important judicial decisions are reported in accordance with law to many different agencies, including the Florida Department of Revenue, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Department of Children and Families, and Bureau of Vital Statistics, to name a few. It has been said that the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit and County Courts touches the lives in its community from cradle to grave; cases range from adoptions, estate matters, family law, domestic violence, mental illness, small claims, evictions, mortgage foreclosures, and more, which affect every community. Services provided by this office are available to all in need of assistance.

25,764
Civil Cases Filed





THE COURT

11 Circuit Judges **5** County Judges
6 Magistrates/Hearing Officers



50,643

Civil Citations

46,512 Traffic Infractions

2,189 Parking Tickets

1,942 Civil Infractions



\$10,797,897

Fines & Forfeitures

Total fines, forfeitures, court costs,
and service charges

CRIMINAL LAW

CRIMINAL LAW CASES are governed by the Florida Rules of Criminal Procedure. The Florida Constitution provides that Circuit and County Courts may hold criminal trials within the jurisdiction of the Court as designated by the Circuit's Chief Judge. Circuit Criminal data includes 476 juvenile delinquency cases.

CIRCUIT COURT

CIVIL LAW CASES are governed by the Florida Rules of Civil Procedure, Family Law Rules of Procedure, Probate Rules and Small Claim Rules. The Circuit Court is responsible for family, probate, and other matters exceeding \$30,000. Circuit Civil data includes 2,670 circuit cases, 3,234 family cases, and 146 juvenile dependency cases. Probate includes probate, guardianship and mental health cases.

COUNTY RECORDER

In Florida, the Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller also serves as the County Recorder, sometimes known as the Registrar of Deeds, and is responsible for creating the permanent record of all mortgages, liens, deeds and other documents having an effect on real property. Known as recording, this includes collection of state taxes such as documentary stamp and intangible taxes, assignment of a unique instrument number to every document, and creation of a verified index for each record. The Official Records of the county date back to 1921, when Sarasota was divided from Manatee County. There are four municipalities in Sarasota County, and the Official Records include filings from agencies and residents within these municipalities. In addition to these duties, the office issues marriage licenses, performs weddings, conducts Tax Deed sales, and serves as an application acceptance agent for the U.S. Department of State for the issuance of passports.





197,730

Documents Recorded

Documents recorded include 15,427 mortgages, 31,526 deeds, 2,035 liens, as well as 24,714 court documents.



\$124 Million

Fees Collected

Fees collected include \$119.4 million in DOC stamps and Intangible Taxes, as well as \$3.2 million in other fees.



3,541

Marriage Licenses Issued

1,245

Marriage Ceremonies Held



11,717

Passport Applications Processed

11,521

Passport Photos Taken



424

Tax Deed Sales Conducted

COUNTY COMPTROLLER AND TREASURER

While serving as the County Comptroller, the Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller is custodian of all county funds. Vendors and others who provide services to county government receive payments for their goods and services through this office. We pride ourselves on having a prompt payment process. Although state law establishes 45 days as the threshold for payments, this office has set a goal of seven days after receiving a valid invoice. Rating agencies, Internal Revenue Service, Securities Exchange Commission and financial institutions rely on the records kept by this office, and the county Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) is prepared and published along with other reports designed to support the community's interest. As Treasurer, the Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller manages the overall banking relationships for county government and invests Sarasota County's public funds to maximize investment earnings while minimizing risk for an average investment portfolio of \$1.5 billion.



70,054

Invoices pre-audited and paid on behalf of
Sarasota County Government

15,110

Deposits verified and entered into the financial
accounting system



69,496

Payroll direct deposits processed on
behalf of the Clerk and Comptroller, Tax Collector,
Property Appraiser, Supervisor of Elections, and
Board of County Commissioners

3,833

Approximate number of employees paid bi-weekly



\$29.6 Million

Interest earned in treasury performance

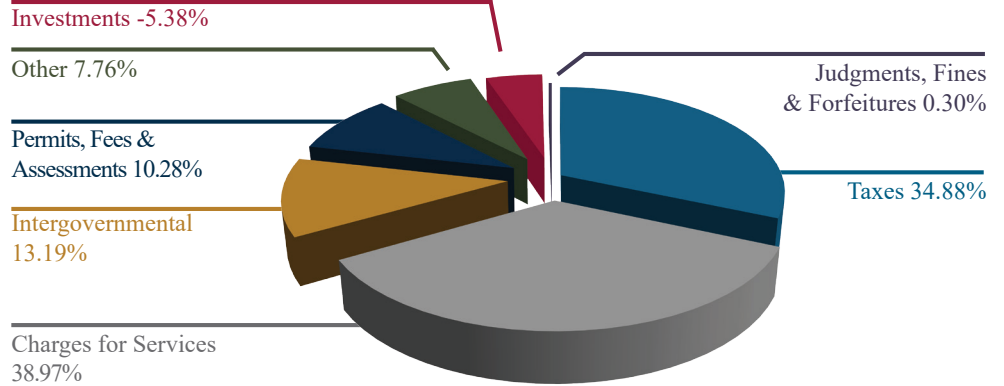
\$1.5 Billion

Average investment portfolio



PREVIOUS FY2022 REVENUE BY FUNCTION

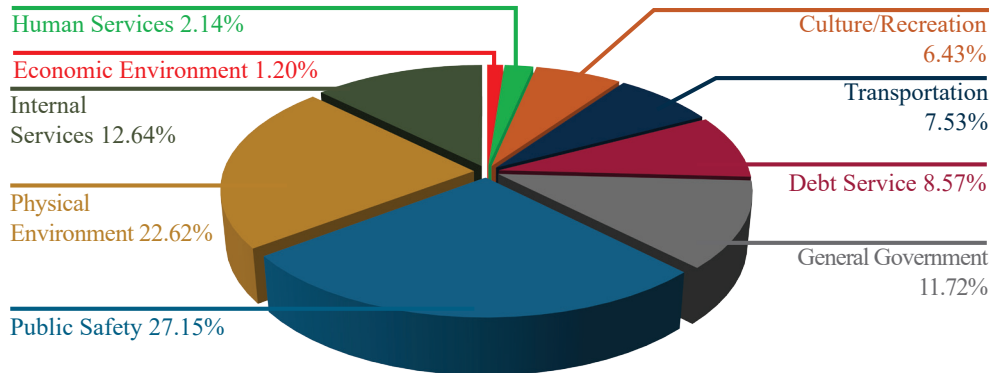
Total revenue for fiscal year 2022 totaled \$1.122 billion, which increased from the prior year by \$75.2 million. The largest percentage of revenue is in Charges for Services, which includes the Utility System and Solid Waste System.



\$1.1 BILLION

PREVIOUS FY2022 EXPENDITURES BY FUNCTION

Total expenditures for fiscal year 2022 totaled \$1.097 billion, which increased from the prior year by \$82.2 million. The largest percentage of expenditures is in Public Safety, which includes Sheriff and Fire Departments.



\$1.1 BILLION

COUNTY INTERNAL AUDITOR AND OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

The Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller serves as the Internal Auditor and Office of Inspector General for Sarasota County and establishes compliance testing with internal controls, prioritized with the use of a risk assessment tool. Fraud complaints are received through various means, including a fraud hotline. Investigations are conducted as a priority over audits.

Emergency Rental Assistance Support

Sarasota County Internal Audit department finished up review and distribution of the Emergency Rental Assistance Support program. In FY 2023, a total of 1,751 checks were distributed and total payment requests audited were 2,434. This work finished up around the spring and early summer of 2023.

Standard Audits

The OIG provide independent, objective audits, designed to add value and obtain a reasonable level of assurance that management processes and controls enable reliable financial reporting; assure compliance with applicable laws, regulations, contracts and County policies; and assure County assets and other resources are properly recorded, classified, utilized and safeguarded.

Guardianship Audits

The OIG is asked to provide audits related to accountings and guardianship plans identified through a Court Order or through the Customer Service department of the Clerk and Comptroller's Office. The information is evaluated and tested for accuracy, validity and reasonableness as it relates to the Guardianship and the related disbursements and receipts.

Guardianships through the SIA (Statewide Investigative Alliance)

The program consists of Six (6) Clerk and Comptroller offices around Florida. They each represent a region of the state and agree to accept Guardianship cases that are referred by the OPPG (Office of Public and Professional Guardians) to the SIA. These cases are audited and investigated by the OIG to advise the Court and OPPG on duties of monitoring, educating and if necessary disciplining state-registered professional guardians.

Investigations and Hotline

The OIG receives complaints through letters, emails, walk-ins and Hotline calls related to potential fraud, waste and abuse of County resources. In FY 2023, the County received 79 Hotline Calls and numerous tips from the community and other sources. The latest survey from the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, 2022, determined that 42% of fraud is detected by tips, which is 3 times the frequency of any other source.

Certifications

The staff in the Internal Audit department maintain a total of 8 designations between them. These include Certified Inspector General Auditor, Certified Inspector General Investigator, Certified Guardianship Investigator, Certified Fraud Examiner and Certified Public Accountant.

Audits & Investigations



15

Opportunities for Improvement recommendations presented to County Administration

12

County and Guardianship Audits/Investigations completed

Training



410

Employees Trained in Fraud Awareness and Prevention techniques

REPORT

FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE OF SARASOTA COUNTY RESOURCES



CALL TOLL FREE

(855) 506-0304

SARASOTA COUNTY FRAUD HOTLINE

YOU MAY REMAIN ANONYMOUS

(when following proper reporting protocol)

REPORT FRAUD, WASTE AND ABUSE

EX-OFFICIO CLERK OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

The Clerk of the Circuit Court and County Comptroller also serves as Ex-Officio Clerk of the Board of County Commissioners (the Board). In this capacity, the Clerk and Comptroller serves as the custodian of the Board's records and minutes-taker of Board meetings and other board committee meetings, as designated. As Custodian of official Board records, the Clerk has custody of the official seal and administers it according to law.





59

Public Meetings Attended
(Board of Commissioners,
Charter Review, Planning
Commission)

35

Code Enforcement
Hearings Attended



1,023

Value Adjustment Board Petitions Filed

4

Value Adjustment Board Public Meetings
Attended And Official Minutes Produced

421

Value Adjustment Board Hearings
Coordinated, Scheduled And Attended



278

Resolutions Processed

102

Ordinances Processed

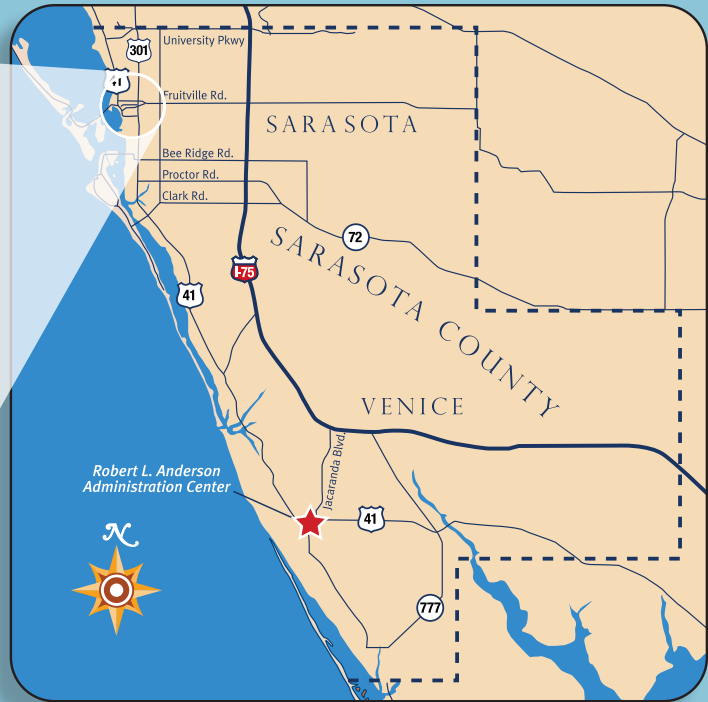
144

Contracts Processed

316

County Administration
Signed Contracts Processed





MAIN OFFICE

Historic Courthouse
2000 Main Street
Sarasota, FL 34237-6022

From I-75, take the FL-780/Fruitville Rd. (Exit 210) toward Sarasota/St. Armands. Turn onto FL-780/Fruitville Rd.; left onto S. Washington Blvd./US-301, left onto Main St.

JURY OFFICE

Judge Lynn N. Silvertooth Judicial Center
2002 Ringling Blvd.
Sarasota, FL 34236

From I-75, take the FL-780/Fruitville Rd. (Exit 210) toward Sarasota/St. Armands. Turn onto FL-780/Fruitville Rd.; left onto S. Washington Blvd./US-301, left onto Ringling Blvd.

FINANCE, INTERNAL AUDIT/OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, AND BOARD RECORDS

Sarasota County Administration Center
1660 Ringling Blvd
Sarasota, FL 34236-6808

From I-75, take the FL-780/Fruitville Rd. (Exit 210) toward Sarasota/St. Armands. Turn onto FL-780/Fruitville Rd.; left onto N. Orange Ave., left onto Ringling Blvd.

SOUTH COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Venice Branch
4004 S. Tamiami Trail
Venice, FL 34293

From I-75, take the Jacaranda Blvd./County Hwy-765 (Exit 193) toward Englewood/Venice. Travel south on Jacaranda Blvd.; turn right onto Tamiami Trail S./US-41 N./FL-45, left onto Annex Road.