



News Release

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Protecting Your Identity Register of Deeds Office Completes Social Security Number Internet Redaction Project

FAYETTEVILLE, NC - Your Social Security number may be at risk, but not on the Cumberland County Register of Deeds web site. More than six million pages of documents have been examined back to January 1935 and the Social Security numbers have been removed from the online documents, protecting your identity.

With identity theft becoming more of a concern every day, Register of Deeds J. Lee Warren, Jr. is very conscious of the fact that the safekeeping of public records is more important than ever. In the last five years, the North Carolina legislature has twice addressed potential identity theft regarding certain public records maintained by the Register of Deeds.

First, the legislature created the “Identity Theft Protection Act” (NCGS §132-1.8(g)). Since Dec. 1, 2005, this law has allowed the public to make a written request that Social Security numbers and other identifying information be removed from Internet sites maintained by state and local governmental offices, including the Internet site maintained by the Cumberland County Register of Deeds.

Warren was concerned that the law did not provide adequate protection to the citizens of North Carolina. He was aware that existing technology could identify and redact Social Security numbers from the digital records; however, legally registers did not have the right to proactively remove these numbers without the written requests of the citizens.

In 2009, North Carolina law was changed to allow Registers of Deeds to redact Social Security and driver’s license numbers from their Internet sites. Cumberland County began this process in 2009 and has now completed the examination of more than six million images since the implementation of Social Security numbers in 1935 to present day.

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With the assistance of Greensboro-based Logan Systems, Inc., this project has been completed and is in place. The process involved the scanning of all documents using Optical Character Recognition (OCR). The OCR output was then analyzed with sophisticated rule sets to identify not only all apparent Social Security numbers and driver's license numbers, but also pages that contained contextual clues for these numbers. Then, Logan Systems' conversion staff reviewed all of the documents that potentially contained Social Security or driver's license numbers.

In all, over six million images have been reviewed with over 100,000 images being redacted. Based on prior experience and quality control methods, Logan Systems estimates that over 99 percent of images that contained either Social Security numbers or driver's license numbers were redacted.

"Completing the redaction process is another way in which we have used advanced technology for the benefit and protection of the citizens of Cumberland County and the users of our office," Warren said.

"We have completed numerous conversion projects that have expanded the amount of data available in a computer searchable format both in the office and on the Internet," he said. Now, users can search land records from the beginning of the county or 1754 to present day. The Internet allows users access to records 24 hours a day and seven days a week. These are just a few of the many technological advancements made since 2003 when Warren took office.

"I'm often told that making records available on the Internet has been critical for the users of our office. I am pleased that the risk of identity theft from making those records available on the Internet has been eliminated with this pro-active redaction project," Warren said.

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