

Into the 21st century: Lawrence saves records on computers: Lawrence digitizing mountains of paper

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Feb. 12--LAWRENCE -- Piled high in the janitor's office are leather-bound books full of information about the city's Nursing, Payroll, Recreation, Budget and Finance departments. On the third floor, a dozen more books, some 10 inches thick, are spread on tables, or stacked on shelves or on the floor. The documents at Lawrence Public Library came from the vaults at City Hall, where they had been stored for decades.

Now, Hawkeye Government Solutions of Milford is working with staff members in the Information Technology Department to bring Lawrence into the 21st century.

"We're really excited about it," said Bryan Cahoon, director of the city's Information Technology Department. "This is absolutely the right thing to do."

Cahoon said his department embarked on the project two years ago when city leaders wanted to reduce the amount of paper used at City Hall. Cahoon said the project will not only make it easier for workers to find records, but it will clear out office space.

In the Health Department alone, he said 17 cabinets full of records were removed, and in the basement, three vaults with ledgers kept in metal cabinets from floor to ceiling.

After evaluating the condition of the documents, Hawkeye workers store them on a SAN computer program. SAN stands for Storage Area Network used for storing and retrieving data on disks.

The information is secure and can only be accessed by employees of that specific department.

"From there, you can print it out, e-mail it or fax it," said Cahoon. "All the capabilities are in the system."

After scanning and archiving the documents electronically, the next step will be cataloging them for instant viewing, a process which would take three to six months. Staffers in the IT department then meet

with members of the secretary of state's office to determine which documents the city will keep and which ones can be discarded.

Records the state does not need can be given to the Irish Collection at the South Lawrence branch of the public library or the Lawrence History Center, he said.

So far, the oldest item Hawkeye workers have found is a 1914 payroll ledger.

"I think it's actually turning out better than we thought because it's not only assisting the city and it's employees, but preserving these documents is invaluable because they would eventually rot away," Cahoon said.

Mayor Michael Sullivan is happy about the document preservation project.

"This is a really proactive venture that is essential and needed to be taken care of," Sullivan said.

Louise Sandberg, director of special collections at Lawrence Public Library, also is enthused.

"I think it's wonderful that the vital city records are being preserved and are being made accessible," Sandberg said.

