

License, Permit, Form Changes for 2011 in Probate Court

“Each year the varied services provided by Probate Court are affected by legislation and regulations and this year is no different,” noted Candler County Probate Judge Tony Thompson. “Some of the changes are minor but customers will benefit from knowing about them”, he added.

With regards to firearms licensing, recent legislation has required that all customers must reapply when their licenses expire. This requires a new background check and eliminates “renewals”. “Licenses are still good for five years and the current total fee is \$75. And now that our Probate Court Information System is up to full speed, we have begun sending courtesy reminders to those whose licenses have recently expired or are nearing expiration,” said Thompson.

“With regards to marriage licensing, one notable change is that blood tests are no longer required. Legislation ending blood tests for marriage was signed by Governor Sonny Perdue in 2003 based on recommendations from the Georgia Department of Human Resources.”, said Thompson. “Their position was that premarital testing for syphilis, sickle cell anemia and rubella had largely proved ineffective from a disease prevention standpoint and that other intervention and prevention methods for at-risk populations were more effective at dealing with those diseases,” added Thompson. The Department of Community Health now provides an information sheet on the causes of various diseases and a list of testing sites which are provided to marriage license applicants. The total fee of \$76 includes certified copies of the application, the license and a decorative copy. “Applicants can still save \$20 on the license if they undergo an approved premarital counseling session by a pastor or counselor. Verification of Counseling forms are available at the Probate Court”, said Thompson

Another notable change is in the new passport application form. The U.S. Department of State has implemented new passport application forms that will be used this year. The new application forms go into effect March 1st. These will be available at the probate court by March 1st or can be downloaded online from www.travel.state.gov.

Guardians and Conservators can now get a copy of the Guardian and Conservator Handbook via mail or online at www.gaprobate.org. “These handbooks are provided as a public service and hardcopies are available upon request”, said Thompson. Also regarding Guardianships and Conservatorships, some may get a notice that their annual reports are due. “This is part of the Probate Court oversight

jurisdiction and the law requires Guardians and Conservators to properly file an annual report and/or personal status report as part of their responsibilities. We are sending reminders to Guardians and Conservators on the anniversary date of their appointment. We can send the status report forms by e-mail upon request”, said Thompson. Additionally, The Probate Court website at www.gaprobate has a video explaining the full reporting responsibilities of guardians and conservators. New guardians and conservators are required to watch the video in the Probate Court before their appointment is final. “Our aim is to help everyone be aware of the requirements and have the process run smoothly,” added Thompson.

Legislation in 2010 raised the cost of birth and death certificates from \$15 to \$25 for the first copy. Additional copies are still \$5 each. “We wrote to the DHR in opposition to this increase and urged an incremental graduated increase if they insisted on it but their position was that the fee increase was long overdue and that the revenue need was immediate, thus the legislation passed over objection.” said Thompson. “A silver lining on this issue is that the price for additional copies remains the same and the mandated use of improved certificate paper. Customers will notice the improved quality of the birth certificate paper which is high quality document paper, is watermarked and bears the local registrar seal and the state seal,” added Thompson.

“This year’s legislative session may produce more changes,” said Thompson. “House Bill 1055 of the 2010 Legislative Session resulted in a variety of fee increases all across the court system in Georgia and that legislation may be revisited this session as lawmakers attempt to address some problems with those changes. We will do our best to keep customers abreast of the changes as they occur”, Thompson said. “As always, please call us at 685-2357 or visit our website at www.gaprobate.org for more information.”