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Hendricks County's own ... CONNIE LAWSON



Danville's Connie Lawson is currently serving as the Secretary of State for the State of Indiana.
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Danville's Connie Lawson is currently serving as the Secretary of State for the State of Indiana. She was appointed March 16, 1012.
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Lawson started out in the service to Hendricks County as the county clerk. Now her office is inside the Indiana Statehouse.
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Lawson's office is in the southeast corner of the Indiana Statehouse on the main floor (second floor).
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Secretary of State is long-time resident

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INDIANAPOLIS — INDIANAPOLIS - Danville's own Connie Lawson is now serving the residents of the entire State of Indiana as Secretary of State. She got her first taste of service to the community right here in our county seat.

"I served as the county clerk for Hendricks County from 1989 to 1996," Lawson said. "At the time, I was working with my husband, Jack. We had our own business — Lawson Brothers. That was before we were Lawson and Company."

Lawson and her husband recently celebrated their 45th wedding anniversary.

"We were a good team but as a person, I wanted to branch out," she said. "At the time, the clerk's race was open and there was no incumbent. I was encouraged to run. I was asked, 'You can do this, so why not run?' So I did and won. That was my first attempt at public service."

She served in that office for eight years. Lawson then ran for the Indiana Senate.

"I was then elected in '96 and started in the Indiana Senate in '97,"

she said. "I loved serving in the Senate."

Last year, she was appointed Secretary of State when Charlie White was forced to leave the office.

She said serving in the administrative branch of state government is very different.

"The most obvious difference is that you can make decisions on your own," she said. "Even though I was the majority leader, we still had to have other people help us make decisions."

Since she has taken office, Lawson has visited all 92 Indiana counties to learn more about their needs.

"Last year, I traveled 14,000 miles across the state," she said. "I've been to counties that I had never been to before."

She said she met many county clerks and other community leaders along the way.

"I got to learn their stories and their needs," she said. "It was a great experience that I was grateful to have."

The office of Secretary of State has several responsibilities under its umbrella. One is to make sure all 92 county clerks have what they need to conduct an accurate election.

"I'm very comfortable working with elections," Lawson said. "As a senator, I worked on the election process. The second highest profile part of the office is the Business Services Division. When corporations are formed they must register. We have probably 40,000 new businesses register a year."

The office is also responsible for the Securities Division, which issues licenses for securities professionals. Lawson said there are 7,700 stock broker firms in the state and that there are 120,000 stock brokers.

She said her office also investigates fraudulent investments or scams.

"We have the ability to investigate and work with local prosecutors and bring criminal charges," she said. "We assist them to take them to trial."

She said one area people don't really know the Secretary of State office works with is the Auto Dealers Division.

"Six years ago, the Secretary of State's office took this over from the Bureau of Motor Vehicles," Lawson said. "We license and regulate motor vehicle sales. There are 7,200 motor vehicle dealers in the state. We license and regulate them. I was aware the office worked with auto dealers, but didn't know the extent until I was in office. I've really enjoyed getting in and learning the nitty gritty of this part of the office."

She said the staff of the Indiana Secretary of State's office has been very helpful to her in her transition from the legislature.

"The staff is full of hard working people," she said. "I had a lot of help from them."

Lawson said the office has between 60 and 65 employees that cover all four divisions.

"We've been working on building our team," she said. "We now do a monthly newsletter and division updates."

She said each month she has a birthday lunch for employees.

"They come and have lunch with me so I can get to know them better," she said. "I think we're really building a cohesive team."

She said long-time friend Kelly Waggoner was also key to her leap to the administrative office.

"She really has helped me with the transition," Lawson said.

Lawson is currently fulfilling White's term of office, which ends in 2014. She said she's planning to run for the office and is hoping to be the candidate moving into the state convention in June 2014.

"If I'm nominated at the convention, then I'll be on the November ballot," she said.

Lawson is also setting goals for herself and her staff.

“My first goal for the future is in regard to the elections,” she said. “I’ll be hosting regional meetings for our county clerks who are interested in learning more about vote centers. Vote centers can help those counties that are strapped and need to save money. The centers can make an election more cost effective.”

A vote center is a type of election process that helps voters in a county to vote at any site in that county.

“They can stop and vote at any center in the county,” Lawson said.

“It’s a way to reduce costs because you have fewer polling places and fewer poll workers. It’s quality rather than quantity.”

The rule is to have one vote center for every 10,000 registered voters.

“And these centers can be in non-traditional places,” she said. “Like in Johnson County. They had one of the vote centers at Jonathan Byrd’s Cafeteria. The poll workers loved it and so did the voters.”

She said she visited a vote center at a mall during the last election and asked people how long they had to wait.

“It was at lunchtime and they said they were only waiting about 20 minutes,” she said. “They had several voting machines so people were getting in and out very quickly.”

There are seven Indiana counties using vote centers and two more are due to come online.

Another goal Lawson has set is to work on a customer service portal for business owners.

“My vision is to be able to interact with businesses, corporations, or small businesses online,” she said. “They would have a user name and password and be able to do their permitting, licensing, and reporting all through the portal.”

She said the system being used now is antiquated and very time consuming, especially for businesses trying to open their doors for the first time.

“Now all these services are separate,” Lawson said. “It will allow for a business to open up faster.”

She said they can use a similar system that the state used to help with voter registration.

“All 92 counties are connected with the Department and Health and the Bureau of Motor Vehicles,” she said. “We have a great model I think we can use for a business portal as well.”

Lawson may work downtown and travel all over Indiana to stay in touch with local county governments, but she comes home to Hendricks County at night.

“I still live in Danville and have lived in my house for 29 years,” she said. “We’ve lived in Hendricks County for longer than that.”

Online:

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