

SECOND CHANCES: Madison County's first Expungement Day attracts hundreds to Simmons Hanly Conroy

by Madelaine Gerard, Staff Writer
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ALTON – Second chances are often hard to come by, but for the attorneys of **Simmons Hanly Conroy** and other area firms, today was the day to help those who need their help get the ball rolling on a brighter future.

In conjunction with the **Madison County Circuit Court** and **State's Attorney's Office**, several hundred people from around the county headed to the Alton law firm for **Madison County's first ever Expungement Day**.

Madison County State's Attorney **Tom Gibbons** believes that second chances are important for those who may get stuck in the system with decades-old offenses, especially after those people have reformed their lives or are working toward the path of reformation.

“The American system of justice relies on the fundamental principle that the courthouse doors should be open to anyone, regardless of any limitation, be that financial or otherwise. It's important for those of us who work for the public to make sure that we're providing every opportunity to make that available. Unfortunately, that can cost money and can be difficult, so we're really lucky to have a partnership with Simmons Hanly Conroy who have provided the opportunities and funding to have this special day to make it possible for all of those people to be there today.”



Simmons Hanly Conroy shareholders Ted Gianaris and Amy Garrett spearheaded the event with chairman John Simmons. Several other attorneys around the area joined in to assist the firm in providing pro bono guidance to hundreds of attendees throughout the day.

Participants checked in in a table at the front and took time to fill out their general information so employees from the Circuit Clerk's office and the State's Attorney's office could bring up their record.

“We're here to assist in reviewing the cases and reviewing the records to determine whether the individuals that are here today applying are actually eligible for the relief

the law provides, whether the individuals who have change their lives or whether the individual is still caught up in the criminal justice system,” Gibbons said.

Once one of 15 attorneys became available, they would assist the attendees in determining their eligibility for expungement or help the process along. The process typically takes 20 minutes with an attorney, paralegal or legal assistant. Students from the **St. Louis University Law School** also helped out with the process.

The litigants primarily focused on the expungement of petty offenses, traffic violations, misdemeanors and other non-violent crimes. The process typically takes 4 to 6 months, but the Expungement Day proceedings allowed anyone who participated to complete the process in around 90 days.