

Pennsylvania Logs On to New Statewide eNotarization System

New program is driven by state-of-the-art Electronic Notary Seal.

By Phillip W. Browne
pbrowne@nationalnotary.org

February 03, 2006



Left to right: Dr. Rich Hansberger, National Notary Association Director of eNotarization; Debbie Thaw, NNA Executive Vice President; Pennsylvania Secretary of the Commonwealth Pedro A. Cortés; Milt Valera, NNA President; and Timothy S. Reiniger, NNA Vice President and Executive Director; gather at the historic Phase I launch of electronic notarization in Pennsylvania at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, February 2, 2006.

PHILADELPHIA — Pennsylvania entered a new era of secure e-commerce on February 2 with the historic launch of a statewide system for eNotarization powered by the Electronic Notary Seal (ENS) Program — a platform for the authentication of digital documents that offers a level of consumer protection, security and trust that paper-based documents have never been able to provide.



Pennsylvania Secretary of the Commonwealth Pedro A. Cortés tells attendees that he expects electronic notarization will be active in all of the state's counties by the end of Phase I.

Unveiled during a gala event at the National Constitution Center, dignitaries — including federal, state and county officials, executives from the real estate and finance industries, and technology industry leaders — heralded the arrival of the ENS Program as a best-practice platform for eNotarization that deters fraud in e-commerce while continuing to maintain the property, due process, business and personal rights that our country's founders deemed critical centuries ago.

Pennsylvania state and county officials, in cooperation with the National Notary Association, pioneered the ENS Program and the National eNotary Registry — the first digital management system for Notaries performing electronic notarizations. The package is widely viewed as a national model for potential adoption by other states, governments and industries.

[Pennsylvania Secretary of the Commonwealth Pedro Cortés](#) told the standing-room-only audience that following Phase I of the program — which is expected to last up to one year — he expects all of the 67 counties in the state to adopt the system.

"We are setting a new path that I think many will follow in the years to come. The Governor and I are very

excited about launching eNotarization. It is one more manifestation in the improvement of the Governor's economic outlook and the improvement of the climate for business in Pennsylvania," Cortés said. "It is fast, easy and secure, and it will advance e-commerce and e-mortgages. This is historic, innovative and greatly beneficial to those we serve in Pennsylvania."

National Notary Association President Milt Valera said the world has been confronted with a new revolution in the dramatic shift from paper documents to digital documents — what some are calling the "eRevolution."



The four pioneering recorders (left to right), Steve McDonald, Lancaster County Recorder of Deeds; Tom Murphy, Westmoreland County Recorder of Deeds; Joan Decker, Philadelphia Commissioner of Records; and Terence Farrell, Chester County Recorder of Deeds, gather during the reception celebrating the historic Phase I launch of electronic notarization.

"Technology has fundamentally changed how documents can be authenticated. While alteration of paper documents is always detectable, tampering with digital documents is remarkably easy, inexpensive and undetectable without some means of freezing the original document or rendering it tamper-evident," said Valera, emphasizing that the ENS Program provides that solution.

"By removing roadblocks that have retarded the progress of secure e-commerce, we will unleash businesses from restraints that held them back and give recorders an efficient, safe system," he said. "We will also spur economic development by providing a reliable and cost-effective method of creating legally enforceable digital records."

**Official Press Release:
Pennsylvania Launches
Electronic Notarization System
to Provide Efficient and Secure
Transactions**

Throughout the evening, several authorities in digital signing, document security and technology research who partnered with the NNA in developing the program graced the stage, including Neal Creighton, CEO of GeoTrust Inc.; David Sturtevant, Senior Systems Engineer for Adobe, Inc.; and Daniel Greenwood, Director of the School of Architecture and Planning and Media at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

But the stars of the show were the four pioneering recorders — Joan Decker, Recorder of Deeds for the City of Philadelphia; Steve McDonald, Lancaster County Recorder of Deeds; Terence Farrell, Chester County Recorder of Deeds; and Tom Murphy, Westmoreland County Recorder of Deeds — along with Secretary Cortés, who worked furiously over the course of more than three years to make the program a reality.



Nearly 300 federal, state and county officials, executives from the real estate and finance industries, and technology industry leaders were on hand to witness the historic Phase I launch of electronic notarization in Pennsylvania at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia, February 2, 2006.

"This initiative will be successful," McDonald said during his presentation. "Knowing technology and where the industry is going, I have no doubt that within a year all of my fellow recorders will be in my position to accept e-recordings with an ENS attached to it. This is really smart."

Decker echoed McDonald's sentiments.

"Pennsylvania is only one of a handful of states that have this vision," she said. "This program puts us in the forefront with a practical and doable approach. It makes good sense for Pennsylvania and its businesses."

The **Electronic Notary Seal** is used by Notaries to perform electronic notarizations and enhance the security of electronic transactions. Instead of signing by hand and affixing an official rubber stamp seal, a Notary digitally attaches the Electronic Notary Seal to the electronic document. When applied to an electronic notarization, the ENS enables relying parties to detect additions or alterations to a digital document after it has been notarized.

As of January 30, all commissioned Notaries in Pennsylvania are eligible to purchase and use an Electronic Notary Seal under Phase I of the state's Electronic Notarization Initiative. Recorders of deeds in Chester, Lancaster, Philadelphia and Westmoreland counties are authorized to accept documents that have been electronically notarized by approved Pennsylvania Notaries. The Department of State will evaluate the Initiative after the first six months and consider expanding it to other counties throughout the Commonwealth at the conclusion of Phase I.



Carol Allen (center) the NNA's Program Development Supervisor, demonstrates how an Electronic Notary Seal is used and applied to digital documents at the electronic notarization launch event reception.

Notaries performing electronic notarizations must observe all Pennsylvania laws that they currently follow in notarizing paper documents. In particular, the personal appearance rule must be strictly followed. In

and willingness.

For more information about the ENS Program, please visit the [eNotarization area of NationalNotary.org](#) and the [Electronic Notarization Initiative page](#) on the Pennsylvania Department of State Web site.