

Hitched at Honda Center with Marriage Services

Overview: Hitched at Honda Center was the first program in the nation to safely provide essential marriage services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Challenge: On March 17, 2020, the County of Orange and state health officials ordered a shutdown of all non-essential businesses, prompting the Orange County Clerk-Recorder Department to close its offices to the public. The closures created a new issue since couples must be physically present before a deputy clerk to receive marriage services. Marriage services were declared an essential service, so our department had to find a way to safely continue serving the public. Over 800 couples were directly affected, and demand for marriage services was not slowing down. To make matters worse, neighboring counties were also closed due to health orders, deeming marriage services unobtainable throughout the state. Our department received hundreds of calls and e-mails following the closures inquiring about marriage services. Based on the public's input, it was evident that marriage services needed to resume as soon as possible.

Solution: Clerk-Recorder Hugh Nguyen first collaborated with Honda Center to obtain space at one of their empty parking lots to accommodate six portable ticket booths borrowed from the OC Fair and Event Center. OC Public Works assisted the department by transporting the booths to Honda Center. The Clerk-Recorder then worked with Anaheim's Mayor to provide electricity for our equipment. This allowed staff to work comfortably in a climate-controlled setting with everything needed to issue a marriage license. With logistics in place, a call center was successfully created along with a hotline number to be used exclusively by the 800 affected couples and later to the public. In partnership with other government entities and private sector partners, our department succeeded in giving enthusiastic couples the opportunity to get married. We began providing marriage services in Honda Center's parking lot from portable ticket booths, all while exceeding COVID-19 safety guidelines.

Innovation: While other counties closed their doors, the Clerk-Recorder Department overcame and adapted its marriage services process to serve the public in a safe manner for both staff and the public. Our 2020 NACO Achievement Award winning "OC Weddings" mobile app became a crucial part of the "Hitched at Honda Center" program. Couples would complete a marriage license application and set an

appointment for a civil marriage ceremony with the County Clerk-Recorder Department, all from the convenience and safety of personal electronic devices. After arriving, customers could become legally married without ever coming into direct physical contact with the staff member assisting them. Communication occurred by two-way radio, customers received their own pen to use, and payment by check or money order eliminated the use of shared cashiering devices. By using all available resources in an innovative manner, our department provided the full gamut of marriage services from the safety of ticket booths; overcoming the challenge of furnishing transactions that are both in-person and contactless.

Results: Between April 10, 2020 through June 5, 2020, our office issued over 3,900 marriage licenses and performed 2,500 marriage ceremonies, with couples visiting from more than 15 states and countries all while maintaining an environment that far exceeded state and national COVID-19 safety requirements. Our department received high praise from international media outlets and private citizens alike for our creativity and dedication to safe public service.

Replicability: One of the most important aspects of the “Hitched at Honda Center” project is the potential to reproduce our results. When responding to a health emergency, the ability for government agencies to respond in a simple, flexible, and safe manner is paramount. “Hitched at Honda Center” sets the standard for addressing these principles, as government agencies only need to secure access to ticket windows or similar infrastructure and install their existing equipment off-site. This can be completed by any government agency with a need to serve the public safely and directly. Furthermore, our department already overcame many of the challenges associated with this concept. By studying our procedures, other agencies can avoid potential pitfalls and streamline off-site operations with ease.

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