

## 2021 CSAC CHALLENGE AWARDS – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Hitched at Honda Center

**Overview:** In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Orange County Clerk-Recorder Department partnered with Honda Center in Anaheim to resume essential marriage services using box office booths.

**Challenge:** With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the department found itself in a familiar position to all: the need to adapt while protecting everyone from illness. Most department services seamlessly transitioned, as online and mail services were previously established. Marriage services, being extremely high volume and in-person only, were the biggest exception. Adding to the challenge, marriage service appointments are lengthy and require a high degree of verbal communication between couples and staff. Aside from Clerk-Recorder Hugh Nguyen's state mandated obligation to offer marriage services, the immense community response from those requesting marriage services demanded the need to find a safe and secure way to provide services. Couples cited economic hardship, the necessity to add their spouse to health insurance coverage and many other benefits obtainable through marriage that became crucially needed during a pandemic.

**Solution:** The day our offices were prompted to close by the Governor of California, the department's search for an empty home box office setting began. Through numerous contacts, Clerk-Recorder Hugh Nguyen was able to secure space at Honda Center, initially setting up in a parking lot that would accommodate our customer capacity. Portable ticket booths provided by the Orange County Fair and Event Center were placed on the site by Orange County Public Works. The City of Anaheim then provided power for our equipment and the climate control systems in the booths. Due to extremely high demand, we were forced to double the number of booths from three to six. Honda Center also assisted our department with banners, floral decorations, and photo opportunities to help beautify the location. Halfway through our tenure at Honda Center, we moved into the venue's home box office allowing us to help up to eight couples at a time. All the while, our employees were able to remain self-sufficient and equipped with everything necessary to safely provide services at full capacity.

**Innovation:** Not only was our department one of the first in the nation to resume marriage services, but we also took an original approach, and accommodated the highest known volume for such a program. Hitched at Honda Center not only served Orange County, but all nearby residents from Los Angeles, Riverside, San Diego, and San Bernardino Counties - whose offices were closed to the public at the time - and even from other states and countries. Our approach to the location was innovative – first using portable ticket booths, and then the Honda Center's home box office – as well as our systems implemented to reduce contact between staff and customers. The

most important consideration was of course to protect the health and safety of couples and staff alike. The barrier created by the ticket booth window, along with modifications to our services such as providing pens for couples to keep, only accepting payment by check or money order, and communicating with the couple via a two way radio ensured this goal was accomplished. Making safety our chief priority allowed us to expand our operations and offer marriage services to such a wide audience. Our systems were configured to be both secure and functional, and worked in combination with our existing computer programs repurposed by our Information Technology unit for remote offsite use.

**Results:** The results of the Hitched at Honda Center program speak for themselves as they far exceeded expectations and helped deliver the highest marriage service numbers the department has ever seen, even during a year fraught with a global pandemic. Hitched at Honda Center issued 16,838 marriage licenses and performed 8,252 marriage ceremonies between March and December 2020; a 25% increase in marriage services from the following year. The media response to Hitched at Honda Center was equally large, with photos and articles being circulated as far away as Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. By the program's end in December 2020, our model had quickly become the standard for government service during the pandemic, efficiently handled an impressive and unexpected increase in demand, and quickly grew into a wildly popular marriage option during the pandemic.

**Replicability:** The Hitched at Honda Center program can be easily replicated by any agency needing a safe service delivery option. Marriage services are especially difficult to adapt to new situations as they require a high degree of collaboration between the deputy clerk and the couple and encompass numerous legal requirements. If the marriage services process can be adapted, it is safe to assume that this model will accommodate just about any agency or business. All equipment, software, and processes used already existed to some degree, only requiring modifications by our IT and Clerk Operations units to transition to an offsite, remote environment. Beyond the equipment requirements, the only other variable is finding an adequate venue with home box office windows or ticket booths. When dealing with an emergency situation, setting up behind ticket booth windows was a practical, common sense approach to increasing the safety of staff and customers, and to avoid service disruptions.

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