

# MANAGEMENT

## Westchester County Department of Information Technology

### *Westchester Archives & Records Management Program (WESTARM)*

The development of WESTARM was a multi-year project that has fundamentally improved the way Westchester County manages all inactive public records stored for the County's 60+ departments and agencies. The most important driving factors behind this ambitious project were improved accountability for the inactive paper records stored by the Westchester County Records Center and increased efficiency in warehouse management. DoIT and Records Center staff worked collaboratively to develop the online open-source program known as WESTARM to replace the manual, paper-based system for records management. The system's immediate outcomes have been:

- a more accurate inventory with accurate retention periods;
- the opportunity to readily identify records groups for destruction;
- reduction of legal exposure for storage of records beyond their retention period;
- improved warehouse space management; and
- less dependence on the institutional memory of long-term warehouse employees.

WESTARM is a testament to the tremendous impact that technology can have on records management in local government. Moreover, WESTARM reflects the commitment made by DoIT staff who dedicated over five years to convert a troublesome manual management system to an online program whose performance will provide dividends for years to come.

#### **Summary of WESTARM Development and Initiation:**

The Albany County Hall of Records (ACHOR) program was identified by NYS Archives staff as one that might be useful to the Westchester County Archives & Records Center for replication, since both counties had experienced the same unfortunate result in the mid 1990s from the same off-the-shelf records management software product. Albany County Clerk Thomas Clingan willingly shared the software files developed by his IT department with Westchester DoIT and ACHOR provided Westchester with an in-depth understanding of their operations and use of the software.

- Westchester DoIT converted the ACHOR program to reflect its different server platform and re-wrote the software in Visual Basic. The revised software also reflected Westchester's required functionality for the system and the established terminology used by the Records Center personnel and the departmental records coordinators.
- As stated above, Westchester County Archives & Records Center had managed all the County departmental inactive records since 1973 through a manual, paper-based system. At the core were "transfer sheets" that described the records to be stored, the box number and location, but which were often illegible, incomplete as to retention periods and misleading as to the documents described. A grant was obtained from the NYS Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund to hire data entry clerks to complete WESTARM's database that would include the information on these sheets.
- As part of this project, bar-coding equipment and wireless data networks were installed and thoroughly tested at the County's two warehouse facilities. The barcode software interface that connects the hand-held devices to the database, the hand-held's screen design for various functions, and the software program for producing compatible bar-coded box labels were developed by DoIT.
- The labeling of all Records Center shelf storage locations with their own unique barcodes was accomplished by Records Center staff.
- Data on all of the records (approx. 112,000 boxes) was entered into the new system between 2006-07. Every box in storage was linked to its location via bar-code scanning by the end of 2007.

- In early 2008, the first step for implementation was to produce a user's manual and train individual departmental records coordinators and records users to use WESTARM for transferring new records to the Records Center. Efficiency in warehouse management was immediately achieved as a result of the completed roll-out of the inventory and transfer functions.
- In 2009, to strengthen records management practices, two editions of a new electronic newsletter, *Records Matter*, were produced for departmental records coordinators.
- In 2010, electronic requests for delivery were initiated throughout all 60+ departments and agencies. Efforts to improve warehouse space management were also enhanced by an upgrade to the County's wireless equipment over which WESTARM is run.
- In 2010, the final inventory of all boxes and locations has been conducted prior to the final step in WESTARM's development: an online charge back system to the departments for their storage charges.
- In 2010, the Microsoft SQL software that supports the database infrastructure was upgraded to the latest version. DoIT will continue to keep the technology supporting WESTARM up to date.

**Summary of WESTARM's Functional Achievements:**

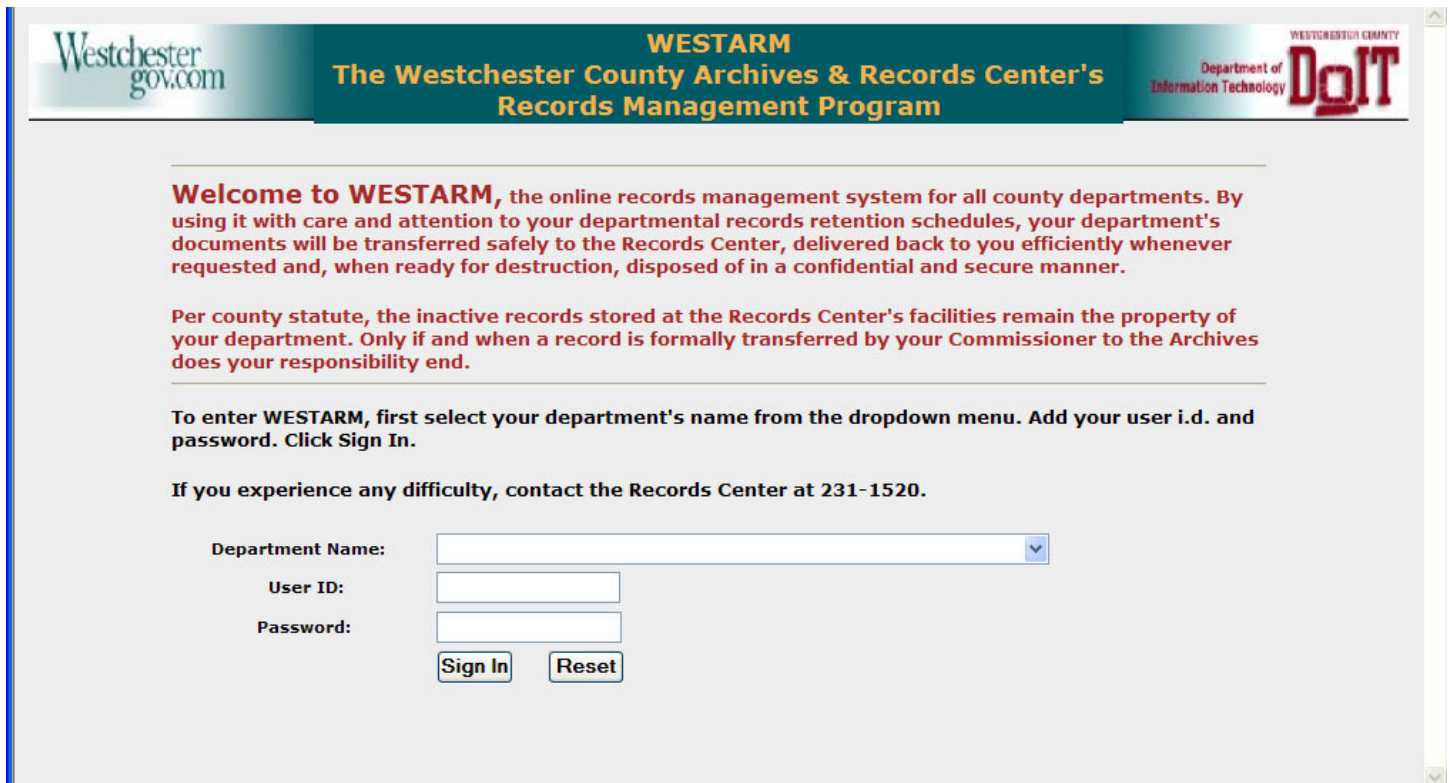
Since WESTARM implementation and training, the system has provided greater accountability for the County's public records, plus improved security and efficiency regarding the management of the inactive records because of the following:

- Refined preparation information regarding records being transferred from the departments eliminates the unnecessary storage of documents;
- 24 x 7 access to information regarding their records and online communication with Records Center personnel;
- More accurate assessment of space allocation and box inventory;
- Time saved in preparation of destruction reports and charge back data, freeing up administrative personnel for other tasks;
- Precise tracking of boxes and folders, reducing redundant requests;
- Less opportunity for misfiling boxes because of the barcode handheld devices, which also results in an easier method for re-filing records once returned; and
- Replacement of institutional knowledge of current workforce with reliable system that requires less education to utilize.

In closing, it is important to point out the sheer volume of records that this new system is capable of managing. At any given point the total inventory of stored records has been in the 115,000 cu. ft. (boxes) range with a capacity now for approx. 148,000 cu. ft. (boxes). In 2009 alone, 26,105 records were retrieved for delivery to Westchester County departments and agencies.

As supported by the above, WESTARM is an excellent example of best practices in records management and is therefore worthy of consideration by the NYS Forum for a Best Practices Award in the Management category. The innovation and dedication displayed by all stakeholders involved will benefit the records management program in Westchester County for many years to come.

## Images of WESTARM



**Westchester**  
gov.com

**WESTARM**  
The Westchester County Archives & Records Center's  
Records Management Program

Department of  
Information Technology **DoIT**

**Welcome to WESTARM**, the online records management system for all county departments. By using it with care and attention to your departmental records retention schedules, your department's documents will be transferred safely to the Records Center, delivered back to you efficiently whenever requested and, when ready for destruction, disposed of in a confidential and secure manner.

Per county statute, the inactive records stored at the Records Center's facilities remain the property of your department. Only if and when a record is formally transferred by your Commissioner to the Archives does your responsibility end.

To enter WESTARM, first select your department's name from the dropdown menu. Add your user i.d. and password. Click Sign In.

If you experience any difficulty, contact the Records Center at 231-1520.

Department Name:

User ID:

Password:

**Image #1:** Front page of the WESTARM system that all departmental users see when logging onto the system



**Image #2:** Cindy Sauer of Westchester County Archives & Records Center explaining WESTARM software to both Linda Bull, NYS Archives' Regional Advisory Officer, and Dave Lowry, NYS Archives Director of Regional Government Records Services.



**Image #3:** Stephanie Chavarri, Records Clerk, inputting data.

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