



## Registry of Deeds cuts nine positions

**By Tom Dalton**  
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SALEM — The Southern Essex Registry of Deeds will lay off four employees tomorrow, part of nine positions being eliminated as part of state budget cuts.

"This is the first time since I've been here ... that I've had to lay anyone off," said Register John O'Brien, who was elected in 1976.

O'Brien said he did not fill five vacant positions at his agency, which records real estate transactions, mortgages and other legal documents.

The registry's budget was cut 16 percent this fiscal year, or \$554,000, which is similar to reductions at other registries of deeds around the state. Its annual budget dropped from \$3.5 million to \$2.9 million.

"We've had budget cuts before, but nothing like this," the register said.

O'Brien said he actually took a bigger hit — a 19 percent cut — if you include the rent he pays at Shetland Park. The agency was forced to move out of a state court building on Federal Street last year due to the construction of a new courthouse next door. It is now leasing space in the waterfront business park.

The Southern Essex Registry laid off three deeds recorders and one management supervisor, O'Brien said. The recorders had been with the agency for three years, while the manager was a nine-year employee.

"It broke my heart to lay people off," O'Brien said from his office at Shetland Park. "In this economy, where are you going to find another job?"

The Southern Essex Registry serves 30 communities and is the second busiest in the state. However, it is a lot less busy in the current economic downturn, with a dramatic drop in home sales and refinancings.

"We are averaging 500 to 600 documents a day now," O'Brien said. At its busiest, he said, the office was handling 2,000 items daily.

O'Brien said he expects to eliminate more jobs in the coming years as the office becomes more automated and more real estate transactions are recorded online from lawyers' offices rather than in person.