

LOU MULVANEY RETIRING

On December 31st, 2006, Lou Mulvaney retired from the Washington County Assessor's Office after 28 years of service. She will be greatly missed by our staff as well as by the Lincoln community. Lou started working in our Fayetteville office in 1971; she only worked there for about a year when she relocated to California. In 1977, she moved back to Arkansas with her family. Then in 1978, she reapplied to work at the Assessor's Office and was rehired in 1979. At about the same time, the Assessor's Office decided to open a local office in the town of Lincoln. Since Lou lived in Lincoln, she was the perfect person for the job. This new branch allowed taxpayers to reduce the travel time to the main office and make the assessing experience as convenient as possible. The office was located in the same building as the Lincoln Revenue Office, and Lou has been there ever since.



When she started, assessments were done by hand and took quite a bit of time in dealing with each customer. By the year 1996, everything had become automated and computers paved the way for faster, more efficient assessing. Lou dealt primarily with personal property, but also helped with filling out homestead credit forms and commercial assessment forms. No matter what task was presented, Lou met the challenge and proved to be a valuable asset to our Office.

On December 6th, a retirement party was held in her honor at the American Legion Building in Lincoln so friends, family, and co-workers could wish her well in this new chapter of her life. She and her husband James have three children and

eleven grandchildren. Now that she is retired, she plans on spending more time with her family locally, and plans to travel to California to visit family there. The entire Assessor's Office and the Washington County taxpayers will miss Lou greatly, but we realize that she deserves this opportunity to spend more time with her family. There are no plans of her family moving, so we will still continue to see her from time to time but the Lincoln Assessor's Office will never be the same.

BY: LEA ROCHESTER

DISCOVERING NEW BUSINESSES

The recent growth in Washington County, has made it more difficult to locate new businesses from within the office. In order to overcome this new challenge a full time field auditor has been hired. This field auditor is able to drive around the county looking for new and unassessed businesses and talking to business owners about the assessing process.

As mentioned in "A New Use for GIS in the Assessor's Office," by Rebecca Carmine, using the newest layer on our GIS maps, we are able to plot the best course for the auditor to drive so that each day will be as productive as possible. These maps will also assist with directions when a taxpayer has requested an "on site" visit.

The field auditor is also able to check businesses' assessments for accuracy. If a commercial assessment does not look complete, the field auditor is able to compare the rendition to the actual conditions during a site visit.

Through the use of field auditing and the GIS maps, we have been able to discover many more businesses. Which keeps us in line with our motto of "...fairly assessing property values, maintaining equity, providing information, and assisting customers in every capacity..."

BY: MISTI KINNEY

INTERESTING FACT

Travel and tourism expenditures in Arkansas amount to over \$3.9 billion each year, contributing over \$300 million in state and local taxes

"Thanks for all the assistance in putting this newsletter together. Particularly: William Stephenson's editing, Dan Cypert's photography, and Cindy Jester for the layout."



Washington
County
Assessor's
Office

"Our mission is to serve Washington County taxpayers by fairly assessing property values, maintaining equity, providing information, and assisting our customers in every capacity within the law."

ASSESSMENT NEWS

QUARTERLY EDITION

February 1, 2007



FROM THE ASSESSOR

Lee Ann Kizzar

There are many exciting changes taking place in the Washington County Assessor's office. Our longtime friend, Lou Mulvaney has retired, and our commercial personal property department has a field auditor and the latest mapping technology to assist in locating every business in the county.

The State Legislature is also in session, and that brings the opportunity for improvement to state laws and procedures. As an officer in the Arkansas Assessors Association, I am privileged to be able to take part in the legislative process.

In this edition you'll find the usual articles about the local office, but you'll also find information from the statewide association regarding legislative issues. I hope that you'll take the time to stay informed about what your legislators are doing, and get involved when the need arises.

Arkansas Assessors Association 2007 Legislative Agenda

The members of the Arkansas Assessors Association are proud to support legislative initiatives which improve equity among taxpayers and increase the level of professionalism in our business.

We support four year terms for county officials because this change would increase the amount of time and effort an official could dedicate to the county and its taxpayers. This would enable assessors, and all county officials, to operate more professionally.

The homestead property tax credit increase has our support because the money is available. Increases in property values in the last 5 years warrant an increase.

Since 2001, when the homestead property tax credit was set at \$300, the total assessed value of real estate in Arkansas has risen more than 30%. We support increasing the credit to at least \$350 to help offset increasing property taxes due to rising values.

The Property Tax Relief Fund is funded by a one half cent sales tax. Historically, it has had more than enough surplus each year to provide the additional credit.

The Ad Valorem Commission has actually been proposed by the Arkansas Assessors Association. Its purpose would be to hear appeals of decisions of the Assessment Coordination Department.

Increasing the Real Property Reappraisal Fund is becoming a very urgent issue. At its current level it will be unable to meet its obligations beginning mid 2008. Local taxing entities, such as school districts, cities, and counties, will be forced to make up the shortfall to pay for the mandated countywide reappraisals.

Arkansas Assessors are very excited about the County Assessors Mapping Program. However, many smaller counties are having a difficult time finding and retaining personnel to do the initial entry of the parcel information. If a Statewide Digital Map Fund were established to assist counties in preparing the base map, the counties would be able to maintain the map as changes occur. (see article next page)

Establish the Arkansas Statewide Digital Map Fund

Statewide digital maps would improve Arkansas' ability to:

- ▶ attract and retain industrial development
- ▶ promote tourism in the Natural State
- ▶ be fully prepared in the event of disaster
- ▶ catalog historical and cultural sites.

In order to compete with surrounding states for industrial development and tourism, it is important to have excellent mapped information, including recent aerial photography. We are living in the age of Google Maps, when people expect to be able to open their web browser and find all the information they need to plan their next vacation or locate a possible site for their business venture. Without digital parcel and road maps, and recent aerial photography, these highly technical people won't be able to find what they are looking for in Arkansas, and they will look elsewhere.

In the event of a disaster, FEMA is ready to provide assistance. The first thing that must be done to receive federal aid is to complete a damage assessment. Using assessor data and digital parcel maps, with the click of a mouse it is possible to acquire this information for individual property owners in a completely destroyed area. With digital road maps and corresponding road characteristic data, the same can be done for damaged infrastructure. This would speed federal money flowing into Arkansas when there are situations that call for such.

These same digital parcel maps and aerial photographs can be used to catalog the many cultural and historical sites in Arkansas. With teams of appraisers in every county canvassing the entire county every few years, this would be simple to implement.

Revenue from the real estate transfer tax has more than doubled in the last 5 years. This windfall, most of which is designated for Natural and Cultural Resources and Parks and Tourism, along with other surplus funds could be used as one time money to complete the statewide digital parcel map. Some of the windfall could be permanently designated to obtain aerial photography every 2 to 4 years.

A NEW USE FOR GIS IN THE ASSESSOR'S OFFICE

The use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to digitally map real estate parcels is becoming more common throughout the State of Arkansas. Washington County is taking that a step further by using GIS for Commercial Personal Property assessment. We have created a layer that pinpoints all assessing businesses throughout the county.

The Commercial Personal Property Department has been working to create a new layer in the GIS digital map that pinpoints all currently assessed business locations. The Department plans to use GIS to discover new businesses and previously unassessed businesses. The map allows visualization of the data already available to identify new commercial areas and existing commercial areas with no assessed businesses. The field auditor is able to concentrate in these areas to inform business owners of the assessment procedures and laws.

Using printed versions of the map, the field auditor plans his canvas of the county to look for new and previously unassessed businesses. Because currently assessed businesses are marked on his map, he does not waste valuable time inquiring at these establishments. However, greater equity is attained by obtaining assessments from new establishments.

Not only does this help to make the Commercial Personal Property Department more efficient and more able to compile a complete listing of all business in Washington County; having the entire office working with GIS helps departments aid one another in the quest to have accurate and complete information. Since each department is able to use all its resources to verify and gather information, they can determine if the information on a property is accurate, such as: whether a property is residential or commercial, if a business has been assessed on a commercial property, what the tax district is, and many other attributes recorded in the Assessor's office.

BY: REBECCA CARMINE