

Taking Care of Business

With each new year, the assessor's office mails commercial personal property assessment forms to businesses in Washington County. There are a few things to keep in mind when filling out these forms.

When assessing a business, make sure the mailing address, physical address, phone number and contact name are accurate. Make any changes directly on the current form for the 2008 assessment year.

If previously owned vehicles are still owned by the business, leave them on the form. When a vehicle has been sold, cross through that vehicle to remove it from the assessment. If a vehicle does not appear on the form, please include a copy of the registration or title—front and back, and a bill of sale. This allows the vehicle to be added to the business assessment.

Additionally, any furniture, fixture, machinery, or equipment that is no longer owned by the business should be crossed through on the form. List anything purchased during the previous twelve months along with the year of purchase and price per item. These steps ensure that assessment records are current.

Any leased property is assessable to the actual owner. A listing of all property leased by a company should always be included with the assessment along with the leased property owner's contact information.

A rendition is not considered complete without a signature and a date. Forms returned without this will be rejected and sent back to the preparer.

Almost every business will have some type of inventory. Different kinds of inventory include office supplies, items used in the course of business and items that will be sold.

Used auto dealers must list how many vehicles were sold during the last year. New auto dealers must list how many of each make of auto was sold last year.

Assessment forms must be returned to the business department in the assessor's office before May 31, 2008, to avoid penalty.

BY: MARY CHANDLER

Credit for Owning Your Home

In 2000, Arkansans voted to pass Amendment 79 to the state constitution. Amendment 79 is often referred to as the "homestead credit" because it gives homeowners a tax credit on their primary residence every year. The credit amount was increased from \$300 to \$350 effective for the 2007 assessment year.

A primary residence is defined as the property where the owner lives. A mobile home is also eligible for the credit if it is the owner's primary residence. If a person owns more than one residence, the credit may only be claimed on the primary residence.

The amendment also limits increases of the taxable assessed value due to a reappraisal. For owner occupied homesteads, the limit is five percent per year until reaching its full assessed value. All other properties are limited to a 10 percent increase per year.

Disabled homeowners and homeowners who are 65 or older are entitled to have the taxable assessed value on their primary residence fixed. Proof of age or disability must be provided to claim this benefit. Proof of age is usually the owner's Arkansas state ID and proof of disability is the Social Security awards notice, Medicare card or railroad, police or firefighter retirement board awards notice.

The only exception to the value increase limitations is newly constructed or discovered property. New construction is assessed at its full-market value. For properties with a fixed value, original improvements will remain fixed and the new construction will be added and fixed at 100 percent of its assessed. Something as simple as a new fence, a wooden deck or a screened in porch may warrant a value increase.

For questions concerning Amendment 79, contact the assessor's office, 479-444-1500, or stop by Monday-Friday between 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m..

BY: SITA NANTHAVONG

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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

March 1, 2008



Lee Ann Kizzar

FROM THE ASSESSOR

My how time flies. I looked up a few weeks ago and realized that I have been coming to work in the Washington County Assessor's office for more than 17 years. It's one of those realizations that makes you take a few steps back and seriously look at the path you're on and where it's headed.

It seems that every day we are faced with problems which require an urgent resolution that at the time seem more important than anything else. In reality, if these problems were viewed with respect to a longer timeline or the many larger issues of the day, they would seem much less important and urgent.

As I move forward through this 18th year of my tenure, I have resolved to make sure I can keep one eye on the forest, even as I give each individual tree the attention it deserves. I hope you will find the time to do the same.

Learning Adventures

The Washington County Assessor's office provides opportunities for staff members to participate in conferences related to assessment. Recently, seven staff members attended the International Conference on Assessment Administration in Atlanta, Georgia.

The conference was sponsored by the International Association of Assessing Officers (IAAO). IAAO is the professional organization of the assessment world. They provide education and research resources for assessment professionals worldwide.

The conference offered many educational tracks that promote excellence in the assessment field, including Assessment Administration and Management, Technology, Policy and Standards, Valuation, Special Topics, and Spotlight and Hot Topics. The presentations cov-



Attending the IAAO conference in Atlanta (from left to right): Dan Cypert, Lee Ann Kizzar, Misti Ackridge, Lisa VanVliet, Cindy Jester, Lee Ann Rochester and William Stephenson

ered every aspect of assessments, including real estate and personal property. Lee Ann Kizzar, Washington County Assessor, and Page Kutait made a presentation about CAMA Standards in the State of Arkansas for the Policy and Standards track. Cindy Jester and Misti Kinney presented information about using GIS for Commercial Personal Property Assessment.

On a local level, several of the GIS staff attended the Ninth Biennial Arkansas GIS Users Forum Symposium in Eureka Springs in September. This event facilitates networking efforts on a local and regional level. Advances in GIS operations and mapping technology were among the

topics presented. The Arkansas Geographic Information office, Arkansas Land Information Board, and other local entities contributed presentations.

The Washington County Assessor's office is dedicated to the continuing education and professional development of staff members. This dedication improves the quality of service to the customers by increasing technological expertise and reinforcing valuable contacts in the assessment profession.

BY: CINDY JESTER

Vehicle Registration and Assessment

Registering a vehicle in a different jurisdiction can be a new and strange experience. Varying state requirements can sometimes make personal property assessments confusing. In Arkansas, there is a three-step process, assessment of personal property, acquiring "tax clearance" from the county tax collector and vehicle registration with the state revenue office.

It is essential to provide the proper paperwork when assessing any vehicle for the first time. If the vehicle is newly purchased, you'll need a bill of sale and the vehicle title. If you already own the vehicle, but are assessing it for the first time in Washington County, you'll need the vehicle's registration.

In Arkansas, all vehicles must be assessed even if they are not going to be registered with the revenue office. Farm equipment, ATV's, boats, trailers, jet skis, heavy equipment and even livestock must be assessed as personal property.

The deadline to assess personal property is May 31 each year. Property assessed after May 31 is subject to a ten percent penalty. The only exception is for vehicles purchased between May 2 and May 31. These vehicles must be assessed within thirty days of the purchase date to avoid a penalty.

The Washington County Assessor has three locations: Fayetteville, 280 N. College, Suite 250; Springdale, 3159 Springdale Ave.; and Lincoln, 215 S. Main. Previously assessed vehicles may also be assessed by phone. Please call 479-444-1520 to assess by phone or for questions concerning the assessment process.

BY: JENNY WIER

Board of Equalization

Washington County completed its three year reappraisal cycle in 2007. A notice of change in assessment was sent to every property owner detailing the new values.

While the notices contain much information, there are still many questions regarding the appeals process and the Board of Equalization. The Board is comprised of five appointed members from the taxing entities in Washington County. One member is selected by each of the following organizations: Washington County school districts, the cities of Washington County, and the Washington County Judge; the Quorum Court selects the other two members. The function of the Board is to ensure that each property is assessed fairly and equitably at market value.

If a property owner believes his value is inaccurate after he has discussed all factual information with the appraisers, he must schedule an appointment with the Board to appeal the value. By state law this must be done before the third Monday in August. If the deadline is missed, the valuation concern cannot be addressed until the following year; however, quantitative errors may be corrected.

Once the appointment is scheduled, it is very important that the property owner appear at the appointed time. The Board hearing provides the owner with an opportunity to present current evidence supporting a valuation concern. Evidence might include sales data, a recent appraisal, deeds, surveys, photographs, estimates of repairs, floodplain maps or floor plans.

Board decisions are based on a majority vote among the board members. The property owner will be notified within ten working days of his appointment of the Board's decision. The Washington County Clerk's office records the minutes for all Board sessions and sends the decision notifications.

Board decisions may be appealed to County Court. Decisions of the County Court may be appealed in the Circuit Court system of the state of Arkansas.

For real estate questions such as ownership discrepancies, acreage corrections, etc., call the assessor's office at 479-444-1500.

BY: NANNETTE BHAUMIK