



THE ASSESSMENT FILES

COUNTY ASSESSORS ASSOCIATION OF OKLAHOMA

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News From the President

Hello Assessors and Deputies,

Where did our summer go? School has started again and it seems like we just celebrated school getting out. I have two daughters who teach—one has first graders and the other teaches 6th grade math classes. If you think the kids are glad when school is out, you should talk to the teachers. We have a family tradition of sending the men to fish at Lake Texoma for a week while the women shop, go to the movies, etc. and -- most importantly -- go out to dinner each night. Everyone ends up happy.

I hope everyone enjoyed the Tulsa school this year. The OTC really worked hard to pull it together in record time. Thanks to everyone involved! And a huge “thank you” to Cathy Hokit and her staff. Registration and planning the evening events is a big job and they handled it very well.

Next up will be our September CODA meeting. Our breakout session will be Thursday, September 15th at 1:30 p.m. Hope to see you all there. We will welcome some new assessors to our group.

I received a very nice thank you note from Vernon Crumm’s family for the flowers our association sent. We will continue to keep them in our prayers.

We are working on plans for the annual school in Oklahoma City. The dates are October 26-28. More on that next month.

Congratulations to Sharon Lane of Delaware County on her retirement! We all wish her well and hope she enjoys every day. It is quite an accomplishment to stay so nice and kind when you’ve worked 33 years in the assessor’s office!

Hope to see you all at CODA!

Denise Heavner

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Ad Valorem Update

Greetings from the Ad Valorem Division!

Tulsa Conference 2005, the 61st Anniversary, will long be remembered as the year of the last-minute hotel arrangements. We struggled for a long time until we finally got all the bid arrangements made and I wouldn't recommend it for the faint-hearted. The Ad Valorem Division staff has been scrambling for the last six weeks. We didn't have as many exhibitors and the student count was down a bit, but we still had nearly 500 students.

On the upside, we had an excellent conference. Lots of good instructors, hard-working assessors and deputies, good stories, and great class participation. That's without even mentioning the County Assessors Association social events in the evening, along with famous bowling outing. We also appreciated the reception hosted by the Oklahoma Association of Tax Representatives (OATR).

We were really pleased that Lt. Governor Mary Fallin, State Superintendent Sandy Garrett, and Mike Kemp of ConocoPhillips (OATR President) were able to attend the opening session. They all made some really candid and informative comments on the importance and stability of ad valorem, the contribution of county assessors and deputies to local government, the current debate on tax policy, and the perspective of taxpayers.

I was also proud that the State Board of Equalization (SBOE) members got to see the latest "graduating class" of initial and advanced accreditation students. We had 114 graduating with accreditation and most of those attended the session. As I said last year, accreditation is not a minor accomplishment. It takes a lot of work and dedication to complete and it becomes more complicated every year as the ad valorem system changes and grows.

We'd like to thank the "team" members: the officers of the County Assessors Association, State Auditor and Inspector (SA&I), and Oklahoma State University. Dr. Notie Lansford, Dr. Mike Hughes, Gary Snyder, and Doug Warr, from OSU. Greg Hodges, Carol Bomhoff, Scott Warren, Johnny Caldwell, and Jimmy Duke from the State Auditor and Inspector's Office. As well as, Phillip Driskill from the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, Kim Ashley from the Attorney General's office, and Shellie Willoughby from the Oklahoma Conservation Commission.

Special thanks to Jim Kelley, Pittsburg County, Tom Henry and Larry Stein of Oklahoma County, IAAO instructors Par Excellent Jewette Farley and Steven Sutterfield. We also had help from Ben Heath and Terry Wood on Internet Security. Travis Schindler, ESRI; Bob Springer, SCI; Raymond Fox, USGS; Mickey Coley, Coley Properties; and Dr. Paul Bendt, Computer Mapping Company, for their help on the mapping track. We again appreciated the participation of "TV interviewees" Debbie Collins, Randy Wintz and Todd Mathes.

We were also happy for the sixth year in a row that the CODA Board held their monthly meeting at the conference. It was a super opportunity for State Board of Equalization (SBOE) members and the other county officers to see the

extent and quality of the training that the county assessors have to go through. The county assessor still has one of the most complicated and technical jobs in county government.

But most of all, thanks to all the county assessors and deputies who worked so hard throughout the week, juggling back-to-school plans, and traveling to Tulsa. We appreciate the effort, and I know all of county government does too.

Now that the conference is over, the Ad Valorem Division anticipates a busy fall. We'll also be completing more software updates, training, and the Equalization Study as well as preparing for the County Assessors' Association Annual Convention.

On behalf of the Ad Valorem Division, "thank you" for hard work during the conference. We appreciate all that the county assessors and deputies do for taxpayers across the state. It's a tough job, but it's never been more important -- as Tom Cusack says -- to be "the guardian of fairness."

Jeff Spelman, CAE Director Ad Valorem Division

P.S. "College isn't the only place to find good ideas. Sometimes you can learn something just listening to the person standing beside you, especially at the Annual Conference." Anwar Cimarron, famous Ad Valorem Philosopher.

This cartoon is more of an October comic, but since I don't know how much space will be available in next month's issue, here you go:



Reporter's Notes

As Denise mentioned on Page 1, congrats are in order to Sharon Lane, who becomes a full-time farmer, ball team manager, and primary “grandkid spoiler” on September 1st. A nice retirement party was held for Sharon on August 19th at the Delaware County Courthouse in Jay. Sharon is retiring after more than 30 years serving the public as both deputy and assessor in Delaware County.

Also, the Grady County Assessor's Office still has four used computers for sale to any county that can use them. County Assessor Phyllis Ray says if anyone is interested, they can call her office at (405) 224-4361.

I'm not sure about the rest of you, but this time of the year is my favorite (next to Christmas, of course). There's something about sending the kids off to school, getting ready for football season to kick off, and the change of the weather (hopefully) from hot to milder temperatures. I really look forward to the changes on both the personal and professional level. It's nice when the Report to the Excise Board is completed, reval (oops, “visual inspection”) for '06 is winding down, and there's a sense of calmness around the office. Of course, with budget meetings in full bloom, CODA coming up, and the Annual Assessors' Conference to plan...is there ever any real “down time” in the assessor's office?

Speaking of football season kicking off, are there other fans of the two/three major state universities that are as excited about this football season as yours truly? I can't seem to help but think that this season mirrors the 2000 football season for OU (and remember what happened that year, Sooner fans) and OSU fans can't help but be excited about the Gundy era in Stillwater. Not to sound like a commercial for ABC programming, but...“Are you ready for some football?”

Looking forward to seeing you all at CODA at the ol' trusty Biltmore!

Your Reporter,
Todd Mathes



September Birthdays

Kelli Minson (Craig)	September 3
Thyra Grounds (Texas)	September 4
Gail Hedgcoth-Shirley (Osage)	September 6
Patty Hiner (Cimarron)	September 12
Judy Barnes (Kay)	September 14
Judie Thompson (Wagoner)	September 17
Ronnie Funck (Canadian)	September 18
Teresa Tallon (Jefferson)	September 20
Cathy Carlile (Love)	September 22

Copy of an article that appeared in the Daily Oklahoman earlier this month:

Let's care about doing right

By Dave Herbert

The governor and the leadership of the Legislature are all patting themselves on the back over the latest legislative session and making sure everybody knows what a great job they did. They have mailed letters and fliers to their constituents praising the fact that they solved the state's problems and had money left over. This session may have been popular to some, but was it responsible?

What you don't hear about are the things left on the table, the unpaid debts of the state. The state of Oklahoma owes millions of dollars to the Emergency Management Fund. This is the fund that is supposed to repay the counties for their work in cleaning up after the ice storm some years back, and for the tornado damage in many counties around the state. This is money that came out of the pockets of many poor counties with the promise it would be paid back. All efforts to get the governor and the Legislature to repay this debt fell on deaf ears.

The Ad Valorem Reimbursement Fund is supposed to repay schools, counties, libraries and other entities for lost property tax revenues when the Legislature cuts some sort of special tax break or exemption to businesses for economic development. This fund is millions of dollars behind in paying its obligations to schools and counties. Efforts to get the governor and Legislature to address this problem also fell on deaf ears.

These aren't new obligations. The governor and the Legislature have always promised that when they got the money, they would take care of these obligations. These debts aren't as popular as tax rebates, tax cuts or tax exemptions, and nobody gets re-elected sending out a letter saying, "We paid the bills." However, it's time for our legislative leaders to worry more about being responsible and less about being popular.

A special session has been called to bail out the Department of Corrections. This would also be an excellent time for our leaders to step up to the plate and pay their other lawful obligations. It's time for our leaders to lead. Good government requires that our leaders care more about what's right than what's popular.

Herbert, a consultant for the state's County Government Legislative Council, is a former state senator from Midwest City.