Issue 2 Volume 5
An affiliate of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

Accessing AAP on the Web

As a member of the Assessors' Association of Pennsylvania (AAP), the association has a number of technology resource and member benefits available to you that you can start taking advantage of beginning today that will greatly assist you in your day to day work in the assessment field.

Number one on the list of resources is AAP's web page, *www.pacounties.org/aap*. The website is where you can find information about the latest AAP education and conference offerings, chapter education and meetings, a listing of the Board of Governors, links to other assessment agencies and county offices and our exclusive "Members Only" section.

The **Members Only** section is where members can gain access to the AAP's electronic Membership Directory. The Directory has all the information you may possibly need for each county assessment office plus pictures (if available) of AAP members. The listing of members in the Yearbook is continuously updated as AAP receives updates from the counties.

One of the most important **Member Only** services is the ability of members to access their class transcript for each certification period. AAP does keep track of each class a member has taken, whether at an AAP conference or a chapter meeting. Members can check their credits anytime.

To access the **Members Only** section of the website, each member must register with the website. After you have registered, you will be sent notification that you have been granted members only rights to that section of the site. It's simple, easy and quick to do. If you have not yet registered, you might want to do so as soon as possible to start taking advantage of these important member benefits. Check out this important offering of your membership dues!

Other information available in the **Members Only** section is a library of previous Board of Governors' minutes and back issues of the AAP Journal. IF you are looking for important information on past activities, or are looking for information on a topic of interest, this section of the AAP website is an important tool available to you exclusively as a member.

One of the best methods to communicate with your colleagues and receive quick responses is the AAP List Serve, which is available to all active AAP members. The List Serve is a free Internet tool where active members may post a question to the others on the list about an assessment problem that your colleagues may be able to answer. Everyone on the List Serve is an AAP active member and the list is monitored and administered by AAP staff. *This service is provided for AAP active members only and should be used in a professional manner.* If you are not already a member of the AAP List, you are invited to join and find out how easy it is to get the information and insight on assessment issues that you need. The List Serve puts the knowledge of your colleagues, with their vast areas of expertise, quite literally at your fingertips.

To join the list serve or if you have questions about the AAP website or list serve, please contact Lori Lawyer, AAP Administrative Assistant, at 717-232-7554 x.3112 or *llawyer@pacounties.org.*

IDEAS FOR YOU

Introduce your support staff to your customers

People in support roles at many companies often spend their entire careers without meeting any customers face to face. Remedy this by bringing a support staff member on an outing. The cost of the trip is nothing next to the motivation it will bring. The support staff will get a better feel for customers, and will appreciate the fact that you value them enough to introduce them to important people with whom your company interacts.

Listen for more than the "squeaky wheel"

When work piles up or tough problems take a lot of your time, you depend on your veteran employees to work on their own. Good, but don't forget to recognize their efforts when the smoke clears. Employees who step up are often proud to help out, but over time not being recognized for extra effort can cause resentment. They may feel taken for granted because they are so dependable.

WHAT'S INSIDE

The President's Report,
Legislative News,
Recruiting Employees,
Legal Update,
AAP People,
and more!

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The President's Message

Lessons Learned Along The Way

This being my last President's Message for the AAP Journal I have a few observations I'd like to share with you:

My term as President went quickly, almost too quickly. And it wasn't as difficult a job as I first thought. So to those of you who assume being on the AAP Board may take too much time from your day job, you don't need to worry. That's because the AAP has a lot of support and guidance from Doug Hill, Terry Cochran, Lori Lawyer and the staff of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania. And, there was a lot of assistance from other members of the AAP Executive Board: Eric Brown, Randy Waggoner, Paulette Sebring and Jim Hercik.

One of the more interesting aspects of being on the Board is planning conference classes. I've always considered that the classes and the instructors we invite to the conferences is the most important obligation we have. In reviewing the evaluation forms after a conference, I am more concerned about what you as a member thought about the classes rather than the facilities or the meals. Yes, meals and room temperature are important, but we really don't have much control over that part of the event.

And speaking of conferences, I encourage you to try to make the spring and fall conferences as often as possible. You can learn a lot by mingling with other assessors from around the state who have the same day-to-day problems as you. Plus, you meet some very nice people.

And speaking of people I would like to say that the people I have met through this organization are among the finest, most professional people I have had the privilege to meet. No matter what the assessment problem, everyone I speak with on the phone or at the conference or chapter meeting is willing to help me find an answer. It's reassuring to know that we have friends like this that we can turn to.

Thank you for letting me serve as President.

Good Luck Eric!

Tom

Thomas Hill

Top Ten Ideas

for Recruiting Great Employees



Looking for talent? The smartest employers, who hire the best people, recruit a pre-qualified candidate pool of potential employees before they need to fill a job. Or, as Harvey Mackay, well-known, irreverent, author and speaker, says about networking, Dig Your Well, Before You're Thirsty.

You can develop relationships with potential candidates long before you need them. These ideas will also help you in recruiting a large pool of candidates when you have a current position available. Read on to discover the best ways to develop your talent pool and recruit employees.

The earlier you adopt these practices, the better your organization will do in the upcoming war for talent. (And, trust me, you will experience wars for talent as the baby boomer generation retires.) Read on to discover the best ways to develop your talent pool.

Recruiting Your Ideal Candidate

Even more useful is the process you use to develop the job description internally and the behavioral characteristics of your ideal candidate. Assemble a team of people who represent the best qualities of the people who currently hold the same or a similar position. Include the hiring manager.

Develop a job description that delineates the key responsibilities and outputs of the position. Then, define the behavioral characteristics of the person you feel is your ideal candidate. Finally, list your five to ten key responsibilities and characteristics you will use to screen resumes, perform phone screens and eventually, establish the questions for the candidates you interview.

Sound like a lot of effort? It is. But, you'll have a much better idea about the characteristics of the ideal candidate you want to attract to your company.

Tap Your Employee Networks in Recruiting Candidates

Spread word-of-mouth information about the position availability, or eventual availability, to each employee so they can constantly look for superior candidates in their networks of friends and associates. Use trade show booth time to meet and get to know potential candidates as well as customers. Encourage employees to gather business cards from and develop relationships with high potential possible employees. And, don't stop with employees alone; tap the networks of your social, board, funder and academic connections, too.

Make sure you publicize your interest in employee referrals. In some companies, employee referrals, especially for hard-to-fill positions, are even rewarded with cash bonuses. Posting all open positions, announcing openings at the company meetings and sharing growth plans with company members will help spread your message.

Take Advantage of Your Industry Contacts, Association Memberships and Trade Groups for Recruiting Candidates

Pay for employees to participate in and network in industry groups, conferences and trade shows. Periodically, create master lists of industry leaders and other potential employees from customers, colleagues, coworkers and friends. Develop a plan for contacting these people systematically and

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DEADLINE for the Summer issue is July 6, 2007

Article ideas and submissions are welcome. Send them to:

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MEMBER-ABILIA



Name: Kim Steigerwalt

Position: Chief Assessor

Years in assessment field: 19

County: Carbon

Marital status and family: Married 16 years. One Son, Brandon who is 15, and a stepson, Jeffrey, who is 25 and one stepdaughter, Jennifer, who is 24.

What irritates me most in the assessment business: No matter how hard you try to keep taxation fair, some things just never seem right.

Most people would be surprised to know: That I thought about this question for days and still have not come up with an answer.

Biggest challenge as an assessor: To be patient with the public.

First Job: Clerk in a pet store.

If I couldn't be an assessor, I'd be: The owner and operator of a campground.

If I won millions in the lottery, I would: Build a home, send my son to a good college, share with family and good friends.

Favorite vacation: Camping with family and friends.

Favorite food and drink: Lobster and iced-tea.

Favorite movie: Poseidon Adventure.

Three people living or dead that I would invite to dinner: My mother and my two grandmothers, all of whom are sadly missed.

The hardest lesson I ever learned as an assessor: When our county was reassessed in 2001 and we began implementing the Clean and Green program, I volunteered. Need I say more!?!

If I could live in the past for one day, I would change: Nothing. Everything happens for a reason.

My best friend: My husband, Jeff.

Looking For Legislation?

How to find it on the internet!

Want to find out what is going in the Pennsylvania House and Senate? Wondering about a specific piece of legislation? Or just want to find out if there are any new laws pending that might affect the assessment profession?

If so, here is a website you need to mark among your favorites. Go to *www.legis.state.pa..us* for the latest information on what is happening in the General Assembly.

Once on the site, you can choose between the House and the Senate. Click on Session Information to get the latest on the day's session. Click on "Journals" and you can find a detailed transcript of past session days.

You can find legislation by bill number or key words. Simply type in the information. Be sure to bookmark this site to keep you up-to-date on Harrisburg happenings!

Would your business like to get in touch with hundreds of Pennsylvania's tax assessment professionals?

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Chapter Notes and Other News

North East Chapter

Wyoming County Assessors Eric Brown, Catherine Voda and Brad Killian received commendations for the work they performed helping EMA, FEMA and PEMA after the June 2006 flooding in Wyoming County that affected over 95 residences.

South Central Chapter

Congratulations to the chapters' two newest CPEs; Brandon Swezey, Property Evaluator from Adams County and Doug Boswell from Dauphin County.

Congratulations to John Mavrides, Lancaster County, who has accepted the position of Deputy Director of Assessment.

York County is pleased to welcome Cary Wells, who was recently hired as an appraiser.

Good luck to Janice Elliott, CPE, who retired from full-time employment at the State Tax Equalization Board (STEB) on March 9th 2007. Janice has worked for STEB for over 36 years and will continue to work for them part-time as needed. We wish her well and hope she enjoys retirement!

We also send our best wishes to Ron Witmer who is retiring from York County after 18 years of service, and Ron Kinard who is retiring from York County with 25 years of service.

South East Chapter News

Congratulations to Denise Wadsworth (Philadelphia County) and Ryan Miller on the birth of 6 lb 8 oz Evan Joseph Miller on August 23, 2006.

Happy Retirement to Vince Battestelli, Sr CPE (AAP President in 1983) and Marty Levit, CPE both from Philadelphia County.

Congratulations to the 20 Philadelphia employees who have passed the CPE classes and good luck with the CPE test!

Joan Righter Price from Montgomery County and her husband Fred Price are proud to announce that they have recently adopted a wonderful little boy, Frederick Alexander Price, from Kirov, Russia. The family is doing well and we wish them the best.

North Central Chapter

Congratulations to Rebecca Champaign, Tioga County's newest CPE.

Congratulations to Sullivan County Assessor, Kristina Bedford, who welcomed Leah Kay Bedford on March 7, 2007 at 12:11 AM. She weighed 6 lbs 3 oz and was 18 3/4" long. She joins her brother, Josh, at home who was four on April 28th.

Farewell to Wendell Gunlock

Our sympathy goes out to the family of Wendell Gunlock, former Vice President of Marketing with Manatron-Sabre, who passed away on March 5, 2007. Wendell was a supporter of the AAP, always willing to sponsor conference events and bring items for the AAP Education Auction. We will miss his smiling face and sunny disposition.

AAP Chapter Education

(Please check the AAP Website for any updates)

Upcoming South Central Meetings

The following dates are scheduled: Friday July 20, 2007, Friday, September 21, 2007; Friday, December 7, 2007. The Chapter meets quarterly. Its business meetings begin at 9:00 AM, with seminars beginning at about 9:30 AM at the Adams County Agricultural and Natural Resources Center, 670 Old Harrisburg Road, Gettysburg, PA 17325. Please contact Barb Walter at 717-337-9837, for more information.

Info Com Ad

Legislative Update

Phil Light, AAP Government Information Chairman

We are over three months into the 2007/2008 legislative session and, apparently, not too much has changed in the direction of the General Assembly. After the 2006 fall election there was a lot of talk about how the significant number of new legislators elected could change the direction of legislation this session. But, so far, I don't see a lot of evidence of that. At least, it doesn't appear to have had much affect in the area of property tax legislation. In the spirit of nothing new, there have been nine bills introduced so far that would provide for increased property tax reduction for senior, low income and disabled citizens. Eight bills would extend additional property tax reduction or exemption to firefighters, emergency personnel, disabled veterans and surviving spouses of military personnel killed in action. And, of course, there are at least nine bills that would mess with school property taxes in one way or another. The most extreme is House Bill 440 which would, if enacted, prohibit school districts from levying a real property tax for any purpose effective June 30, 2008. I wonder if our state legislators saw the report published by the Pennsylvania Economy League that stated that 45 percent of the General Assembly considered property tax reform to be a top priority while less than 15 percent of the public still considered it that important. It may be interesting to see how they react to the results of the May 16th primary voting on the school district tax shifting referendums. At least in my county, there is a large effort by various groups and school board candidates to defeat the changes proposed by the present school boards.

In the area of Clean and Green, there is a mixture of new and old in three bills proposing to amend Act 319. On the House side, House Bill 656 would allow owners to lease ground to wind farm operators without fear of losing preferential assessment on their remaining ground. Rollback taxes would be assessed on the leased portion and that land would be removed from preferential assessment. House Bill 667 would allow a property owner to remove property from Act 319 preferential assessment upon proper notification and payment of rollback taxes. It also contains provisions that would allow removal without rollback under certain conditions. On the Senate side we have SB 708 which would be a major revision to Act 319 and would raise the minimum acreage from 10 to 30 acres on agricultural and forest reserve land. There would also be changes to the definition of forest reserve land and a significant increase in the amount of paperwork required on the part of the property owner and the assessment department.

Some returning items of legislation that deserve some attention are House Bills 213 and 214 which would allow someone, other than an attorney, to represent an appellant before an appeals board with a signed power of attorney in third through eighth class counties. House Bill 297 and Senate Bill 61 would give the property owner the right of first refusal on the sale of mineral rights. Senate Bills 190, 191 and 192 would prevent appeal boards from charging any type of fee relating to assessment appeals in counties of the second through eighth class. And, House Bills 949 and 953 along with Senate Bills 485 and 721 are worth re-reading in their present form as they deal with changing the structure of the State Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers, increasing the amount of civil penalty that may be assessed on an infraction and would broaden the language regarding offenses. House Bill 175 would require an extremely detailed report to be submitted by all local government units to the DCED each year concerning tax abatements, reductions and exemptions. Failure to do so would cause certain payments to be withheld. Senate Bill 727 would change the Errors and Refunds section in the General County Assessment Law by removing the six year limitation on refunds. And, Senate Bill 413 would bring second class counties in line with the rest of the world by prohibiting assessment of signs and sign structures. As you may remember, Act 142 of 2006 prohibited assessment of such property in all other counties.

There is one new initiative that I don't remember seeing before. House Bill 939 would provide for a uniform percentage phase-in of the increased taxation of each property resulting from a countywide revaluation over a period of five years in counties of the first class. That, along with a few miscellaneous bills that attempt to straighten out the language in previous acts, makes up the property tax legislation introduced so far. If, for whatever reason, you feel an overwhelming desire to contact me I'm still Phil Light, AAP Government Information Chairman, 724-830-3104 or you can reach me via my email at *plight@co.westmoreland.pa.us.*

Pennsylvania's Legislative Process

A refresher course in the basics

The Pennsylvania General Assembly has 253 members-203 members in the House of Representatives and 50 Senators. Representatives run for re-election every two years, Senators serve four year terms, but Senatorial elections are held every two years, so in any even-numbered year only half of the Senators are up for re-election.

A legislative session lasts two years, beginning with the odd-numbered year and ending with the even-numbered year (i.e. 2005-2006 legislative session). At the end of a two year session, all bills die but can be reintroduced in a subsequent session.

General Assembly Consideration Of Legislation

A bill may originate in either chamber. It is assigned an identification number based on the chamber of origin (i.e. House Bill 4, Senate Bill 56). Each bill also has a printer's number- this number changes every time the text of the bill is modified in any way.

After a bill is introduced, it is assigned to a standing committee. Committees may hold hearings on the bill, or simply vote it out without a hearing. A committee chair may also choose not to bring a bill up for a vote.

If a bill makes it out of committee, it must be considered on the floor of the originating chamber on three separate days. Some time during this time period, both Republican and Democrat caucuses will review the bill. The bill also must be passed through the Appropriations Committee for a fiscal note before final consideration. If the bill is ultimately brought up for a vote, debate only occurs on day three of consideration. If the bill passes, it moves to the other chamber, and the committee review process and three separate considerations must be repeated.

If the second chamber amends the bill, it must return to the chamber of origin for a concurrence vote. **Both chambers have to agree on an identical version of the bill before it moves to the Governor's desk.** This means a bill may be exchanged between chambers several times before a compromise is reached. If both chambers insist on different amendments, the bill moves to conference committee to craft a compromise, and both chambers must approve the conference report before it advances to the Governor.

Governor's Consideration of Legislation

When a piece of legislation arrives on the Governor's desk, he/she has ten days to act. The Governor has several options:

- Sign the legislation as is.
- Not sign the legislation. The bill automatically becomes law if not acted upon.

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regularly. Be prepared to share your job description with them through mail, e-mail, on the Internet and by fax. Follow up on every good lead.

Use Your Website for Recruiting Candidates

Does your "Join Our Team" section of your company website tell and even, "sell," potential employees about the vision, mission, values and culture of your company? Do you present a message about how people are valued? Do you express your commitment to quality and to your customers? If not, you are missing out on one of the most important recruiting tools you have to appeal to prospective high-potential employees.

Instead of the typical, dryly-written job listings about available positions, your website needs to include this vision, this information that sets your company apart from others in your industry.

Maintain Frequent Contact With Interested Candidates

Don't let these potential employees submit their resumes and never hear from you again either. You'd lose all the momentum you just spent time developing with the favored few. As recommended earlier with employee networks and professional contacts, continue and nurture the relationship.

Become an Employer of Choice for recruiting Candidates

Think about what a potential employee considers before agreeing to join your organization or business. Are you stable, making money and growing? Are you employee-friendly? Does your mission catch the mindshare and/or the heartstrings of the people you most want to recruit? Will a new employee feel part of something bigger than themselves if they join you? Will your organization nurture their talent and provide exciting opportunities for challenge and professional growth?

If you can answer these questions affirmatively, analyze every component of your recruiting process to make sure that you are sending these messages. If you want to be an employer of choice, you must act like an employer of choice. Furthermore, you must communicate this commitment to your prospective employees.

Recruit Using the Internet

The Internet, in addition to your own organization website, is in its infancy in terms of its usefulness to employers, potential employees and society, in general. Learn how to use the Internet to find and attract great candidates. These are options you can currently consider.

Post your positions on professional association websites. This includes local chapter websites or professional associations related to the job. (This is an excellent method for finding local talent.)

Post open positions on websites that private vendors or your state and/or local government provide.

Post the classified ad on newspaper-related websites.

Most newspapers have an affiliated website where you can post ads. These ads are either included in the price of a classified print ad or you can pay separately for online posting only. Make sure your recruitment ads "sell" the vision and the advantages of your organization. Effective ads portray

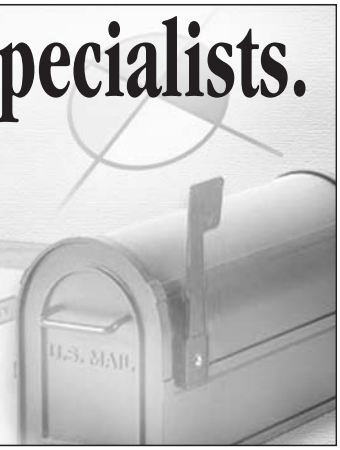
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Use Temporary Agencies and Firms for Recruitment

Consider using temporary staff as a solution to "try a person out in a position" or to staff a position you are not sure you need for the long haul. Temporary employees also can provide a useful buffer for the ups and downs of the business cycle so that you do not have to affect your core staff during down times.

Temp firms will recruit and screen to your specifications and guarantee your satisfaction. They save your staff immense amounts of time as they provide testing, drug screening, reference checking, background checks, and anything else you'd like, for a nominal fee.

Find Out Where Your Ideal Candidates Live

Identify what your needed candidates read; notice the websites they visit; study the listservs on which they participate; determine the industry magazines and newspapers they read. Identify their favorite news sources, forums, discussion group threads and places to network. In other words, find out everything you can about the types of people who make up the top ten percent of your current employees and the best of your talent pool.

Just One More - Publicity

The publicity your organization receives in the news media, in print, on television, on the radio and online is tremendously important for recruiting. A few good words, an interesting article or a piece about your mission that reflects your organization in a favorable light, will result in candidates coming to you. And that, in my way of thinking, is the best way of all to find great candidates for your candidate pool.

Ideas for recruiting are endless and endlessly challenging, but the time and effort you invest are worth it when they result in top talent for your organization.









Solicitor's Commentary

Guthrie Clinic Case

By

Alfred K. Hettinger, AAP Solicitor

"Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterwards." *-Vernon Law*

When asked to do this article for the Journal regarding the Sullivan County - Guthrie Clinic case I felt this quotation was most appropriate. Experience is a hard teacher but a good one and we learn not only from winning but from losing. (Quite often I have learned more from losing than winning.)

There are lessons to be learned from this case.

When you have a tough case, get the expert you need.

As soon as I got involved with the case and was asked to represent the counties, I knew I needed help with the figures… so I obtained the invaluable services of Bruce Loch, Forensic Accountant. He did the work; I asked the questions and made the argument.

Prepare your case from both sides.

While it is a fundamental rule, you should always know the strengths and weaknesses of your case and your opponent's. Your expert should be used extensively for this.

Get the co-operation of the parties you represent.

They have information important to the case. They can co-operate in giving it to you and in paying the bills. Sullivan, Tioga, and Bradford did so.

Know your case inside out and prepare both the direct and cross-examination.

Again, use the expert. He is the key to your success or failure. Have him nearby during the trial to give you insight and information to assist you.

Never miss an opportunity to make a point you couldn't otherwise get before the court.

The first opportunity was in the trial when I had the Controller for Guthrie on the stand and was cross-examining him regarding his figures and their meaning. But the key issue was whether Guthrie had paid bonuses to the physicians and the administrative personnel. Bruce shoved a note to me to ask if he had ever been paid a bonus. I did. He admitted that he had and that it had been based on performance, as it was with all the other Guthrie doctors! The judge nodded wisely.

The second opportunity came at the argument before the Commonwealth Court. After the argument had been completed, Judge Friedman, after commenting that it had been some time since she had been in Sullivan County, asked me how many lawyers there were in Sullivan County now. I told her I wasn't sure but I believed that there were eight. Then I added, "But I can assure you they don't make as much money as any of these doctors!" This was a point I could not argue or brief but it rocked the courtroom with laughter…and my opponent with furor.

There you have it: a number of lessons to be learned from this innocent looking but important case. We turned the Commonwealth Court around to declare Guthrie taxable and divert the Court's prior course to granting exemptions rather freely. Our experience was a great teacher. I hope it will teach you too.

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- Veto the bill. A veto can be overridden by a 2/3 majority vote in both the House and Senate.
- Veto certain portions of budget legislation, known as the line-item veto. Line item vetoes can also be overridden in the same manner as a full veto.

A bill that becomes law is assigned an act number, and will be called Act ## of (year). In other words, there is an Act 1 of 1956, Act 1 of 1922, Act 1 of 2006, etc. The Act will be codified into existing law.

Future AAP Conference Dates

Fall Conference - November 1 - 2
Nittany Lion Inn, State College

2008

Annual Conference - April 30 - May 2
Hilton Harrisburg

Fall Conference - November 13 - 14
Wyndham Gettysburg

2009

Annual Conference - April 29 - May 1
Seven Springs, Somerset

The Legislative Process:
What You Can Do

As county, state and federal legislators are charged with making critical budget and policy decisions that affect constituents it is imperative that they are provided with accurate, detailed information to assist them in making informed and responsible choices. As a county employee you may be in a position to provide expert information and educational materials to the members of the General Assembly and their staff members.

AAP is not a lobbying organization and our members cannot lobby for the Association; we rely upon the CCAP Governmental Relations staff to lobby on our behalf. However, AAP members are encouraged to become a resource of assessment information for state legislators and their staff. AAP members are frequently asked to testify before House or Senate Committees considering assessment and taxation issues.

It is important to establish a relationship with your local House and Senate members by being willing to discuss assessment issues in your county and sharing your expertise on the topic.

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In today's economy, Pennsylvania communities urge fiscal restraint and accountability. At the same time, they demand more and better quality services. Since the primary source of revenue for local government is the real estate tax, it falls to public policy decision-makers to build a constitutionally-acceptable taxing infrastructure that is both fair and equitable. Since 1976, 21st Century Appraisals has helped county officials meet the challenges of tax fairness.

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