Issue 1 Volume 6
An affiliate of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

PENNSYLVANIA'S COUNTIES UNVEIL PRIORITIES FOR 2008

Local Tax Fairness Is Among Priorities

County leaders from throughout Pennsylvania unveiled their list of 2008 key legislative priorities at a January 29, 2008 press conference while calling upon state leaders to strengthen their commitment to improving equity in county taxation, and to provide sufficient and fair levels of funding for mandated human services. Commissioners also called upon the legislature to make important changes that reduce correction system costs, authorize revenue sources to support local services, and correct court decisions that have diminished counties' abilities to provide important programs to their constituents.

County leaders were in Harrisburg to discuss property taxes, funding for human services and other key county legislative priorities including funding for local roads, bridges, and mass transit; statutory change in the place of confinement to reduce overcrowded conditions in county jails; strengthening 911 services; funding for farmland preservation; and reinstating a county fee for local recycling programs. County leaders said the priorities reflect the concerns that citizens have in their home counties.

Dave Coder, Greene County Commissioner and president of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP), said, "These 2008 priorities call attention to the wide variety of issues with which counties must deal every day. Often, our citizens and state lawmakers are not aware of the scope of services counties provide, frequently with great budgetary struggle. Counties are in the forefront every day meeting the wide array of citizens' needs."

Coder said that it is clear that reduced reliance on the property tax continues to rank as one of the top desires of Pennsylvanians, and that Pennsylvanians want a solution that will more equitably fund all local services and reduce all property taxes, not just school property taxes. "Pennsylvanians do not differentiate between their county, school and municipal property tax bills. Without addressing county property taxes, there cannot be true reform for our residents. We believe the state legislature needs to give our residents a complete package of reforms that allow county officials to reduce their reliance on the property tax by using more equitable funding sources."

"Funding for human services mandates, another CCAP priority, is linked directly to the urgency of county property tax reform," he said. "In a year when a national economic slowdown may negate any surplus and force tough budget decisions in Harrisburg, we are reminding the legislature of the urgent need to

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IDEAS FOR YOU

What do workers want? You may be surprised!

A Saratoga Institute survey of more than 1,000 U.S. workers asked employees to identify factors that would make them more likely to remain with their current employers. The top three responses:

1. Training and mentoring
2. Earnings potential
3. Positive work relations

Job security was also important: Only 27 percent said they were likely to stay where long-term employment prospects were weak.

Does stress bring out the worst in you?

How do you respond to extreme stress? Most people respond in predictable ways. Leaders become autocratic. Quiet, analytical people withdraw. Friendly, supportive people acquiesce. And socially outgoing, expressive people attack. Unfortunately, these innate responses often increase tension within a group because people are reacting to the stress and not to one another. How can you ease the tension? By becoming aware of your own

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The President's Message

Remembering the Basics

Perhaps the phrase "going the extra mile" has lost some of its meaning in these times of quick fixes and super abundance of material things.

Perhaps we are so used to having everything handed to us on the proverbial "platter" that we don't stop to consider how and when it all came about.

My father used to tell me, when I asked for some extravagant toy, that I could have anything I wanted . . . . . as long as I earned it!

Oh, and if I came home from school whining about getting into a fight with someone, he would say. . . . . "Stop whining—you should have thought about how to prevent the resulting situation and done whatever it takes to prevent the 'raw' outcome". I suspect his philosophy was influenced from his experience in WWII, being wounded in the battle, captured and eventually escaping from a German prison camp—no one knowing if he was alive or where he was for eight months. That experience would certainly frame one's outlook on life. I remember him saying that his thoughts during those times were of the basic things such as his family, fresh, cold water from the spring on the home property, evening and Sunday sit-down meals—simple things of that nature, besides watching every move his captors made until the right chance presented itself.

I don't recall him ever complaining about something not going the way he planned it because of something someone else had done. He would make it happen, and it was his desire that got him where he wanted to be.

I think I've kept that in the back of my mind since those earlier days in the 50s and it became a philosophy. When you want something or need something, you do what it takes to make it happen and pretty much nothing gets in the way—yet still hold on to the principles of honesty, integrity and respect for others rights and their property.

Sometimes we need to step back and get in touch with the "basics," to step outside of the "in-your-face, it's all about me" attitude and consider the other person. (Especially while driving— doesn't anyone use the three-second rule or teach defensive driving any more?).

Anyway—step back—take a deep breath—and —— reconsider.

Hope you enjoy the educational articles we've provided for you, and again thanks to all who have taken the time to submit ideas. We depend on you, too.

Eric

Eric Brown

adequately fund mandated human service programs. Typically as much as 60 percent of county budgets is driven by human services mandates, so without a commitment by the state and federal governments to honor their obligations to fund mandated and entitlement services, counties are left with few options other than raising local property taxes County leaders met with legislative leaders throughout the day to discuss their 2008 legislative priorities

During the last five years, the state legislature has focused much effort toward reforming property taxes. Although counties have been calling for changes to property taxes at the county level, the legislative focus has been on schools only and county tax issues have not been included in the reform programs adopted to date. Complete property tax reform will not be achieved until counties are also included in these discussions. It is true school districts levy a large portion of the property tax bills Pennsylvanians pay, but over the last 15 years the growth in county budgets has outpaced that of any other level of government in the Commonwealth, including the schools.

As counties are more frequently forced to turn to local property owners to make up for state and federal funding shortfalls, Pennsylvanians will view the legislature's work as incomplete. In fact, polling conducted by Terry Madonna Research in the fall of 2005 indicated that 80 percent of Pennsylvanians believe it is also important for legislators to address county and municipal property taxes, and not just school taxes.

Counties provide a broad and expanding variety of services to Pennsylvania's citizens. They preserve democracy by administering the election process, improve our health and welfare by helping families and individuals in need with human services, respond in times of emergency, keep our streets safer with local courts and corrections programs, and preserve and showcase Pennsylvania's natural, cultural, and historic resources through careful and effective planning and economic development.

Counties are forced to fund this broad spectrum of responsibilities using a taxation system that neither equitably nor adequately reflects a homeowner's economic condition, and places an unfair burden on many property owners. Pennsylvania's counties believe that local taxes should be equitable and fair; no one should have to pay more than their fair share. That is why the Association has developed its *Blueprint for Tax Fairness*, a proposal that includes input from the Governor, state lawmakers, public officials, and taxpayers.

Tax fairness can be achieved only by expanding the sources of revenue available to support local government. Effective tax fairness measures will allow local governments to reduce their reliance on the real estate tax in proportion to revenue generated by other sources of income. Alternatives proposed by the Association include earned income, personal income, or sales taxes.

The key arguments on behalf of the *Blueprint for Tax Fairness:*

- Tax fairness is about how local government revenue is generated, not how much money is collected.
- Tax fairness is about how the tax burden is distributed among individuals and groups of taxpayers.
- The real estate tax does not equitably or reliably reflect a homeowner's economic condition; in other words, it doesn't consider a taxpayer's ability to pay.
- Both personal income taxes and sales taxes are more sensitive to an individual's economic condition.
- Effective measures that are "tax fair" allow local governments to reduce the real estate tax in proportion to revenue generated by other sources of income, such as a personal income or sales taxes.
- Tax fairness changes should not generate windfall revenue for the taxing entity.
- Any tax fairness measure should have options. Counties should be able to choose their options based on what is best for their individual community.

You can find more information on the C CAP Web site, *www. pacounties.org*, click on 2008 Priorities.

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The *AAP Journal* is published four times a year.

DEADLINE for the Spring issue is March 7, 2008

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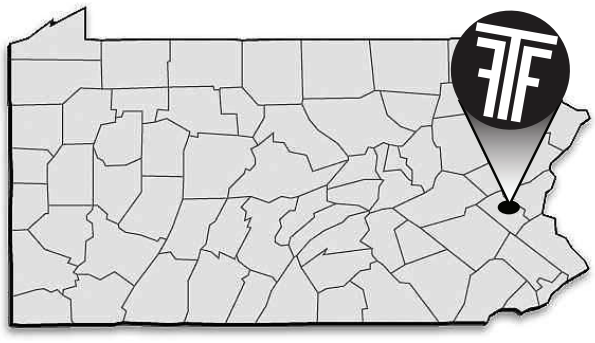
State Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers – Who are we and what do we do?

By Robert McRae, CPE, Chair, State Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers



It might interest some of the AAP membership to know how one gets appointed to the State Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers and what exactly this body does. In my case, it was primarily because I had made myself a long-standing pain in the neck!

As early as 1992, I began working with then-state Representative Jim Gerlach, to attempt to effect some changes to Act 98 of 1990 (Certified Real Estate Appraiser Law) and Title 49, Chapter 36 of the Pa Code (Rules and Regulations of the State Board of Certified Real Estate Appraiser Law). This endeavor continued as Rep. Gerlach became a state senator. Thus began my appointment process, which started with a recommendation by a state senator to the governor – at that time, Tom Ridge. If the governor agrees with the recommendation, he makes the appointment, which the senate must then confirm. The process can take months! Members of this board are appointed to a four-year term and are limited to two consecutive terms. I am currently in the second year of my second term, having been recommended for reappointment by the late Senator Robert Thompson (since former state Senator Jim Gerlach had become a U.S. Congressman by



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that time) and appointed by Governor Rendell. I am the only current member of this Board who holds a CPE certification.

Continuing my efforts to make changes as a board member, I did not realize a measure of success until July 21st of this year! That is when the most comprehensive revisions of the rules and regulations took effect. I am still working with state representatives and state senators to get some long-needed amendments to Act 98 through the Legislature.

My service on your board includes attending, and currently as chairman, conducting the monthly board meetings, which often include disciplinary hearings, and almost always include deliberations on consent agreements (equivalent to a "plea bargain") for appraisers and assessors. A variety of other matters also come before the board on a regular basis, including: USPAP compliance matters, Appraiser Standards Board and Appraisal Qualifications Board matters and mandates, course provider and exam provider matters, considerations and deliberations for applicants who have criminal convictions, etc. As chairman, I also attend a variety of other meetings to represent the board before legislative and regulatory review committees, professional organizations, and various interest groups. There is also a lot of "homework" that must be done by each board member in preparation for each meeting which includes reviewing and commenting on proposed legislation and proposed rules and regulations changes, reviewing applications and appraisal logs submitted with applications, reviewing proposed continuing education course content and qualifying course content, answering technical questions from our office staff and questions from our constituency and the myriad of other matters that might work their way before the board.

Over the past few years, your board has periodically held meetings outside of its Harrisburg headquarters to better serve our constituency. The board encourages attendance at our meetings by those whom we serve directly and by the public in general. I hope that those of you who have attended have found the board's work to be diligent and interesting.

The board intends to continue to hold the "off-site" meetings in the coming years and I urge you to attend a meeting that might be held in your area. And, of course, if you do, please be sure to say "hello."

My service on your board has really been the highlight of my career and one that I am truly honored to have been appointed – I thoroughly enjoy it.



MEMBER ABILIA



Name: Tamra Forgan

Position: Chief Assessor

Year in assessment field: 22

County: Cambria

Marital status and family: Married to Daniel for 22 years.

What Irritates Me Most In The Assessment Business: Mandated databases and lists we must keep and provide to outside sources that do not create any revenue.

Most People Would Be Surprised To Know: Played a mean tambourine in bands and have run sound equipment, raced go-karts, have motorcycle license, and now that I am old I spin fiber into yarn. I wonder if I can knit while parachuting out of an airplane?

Biggest Challenge As An Assessor: Bringing Cambria into the 21st century.

First Job: Would you like fries or a salad with that? Waitress

If I Couldn't Be An Assessor, I'd Be: Involved in the Arts in a cultural facility.

If I Won Millions In The Lottery, I Would: Give to a few specific causes, travel for others and myself, take some classes, buy property that has a stream through it or with a water body.

Favorite Vacation: Anywhere I can sit on a rock in a babbling brook with my feet in the water and the sun peeking through the shade of the trees feeling a slight breeze.

Favorite Food And Drink: Chicken Pot-pie or steak and 7-Up.

Favorite Book: Murder mysteries, although one time when I worked for STEB three people gave me books. A western love story, a murder mystery and an alien attack. I read them at the same time and as far as I know, the ex-con cowboy and girl rode off into the sunset till an alien swooped down and took the girl.

Favorite Movie: Fried Green Tomatoes. Towanda Lives!

Three People Living Or Dead That I Would Invite To Dinner: My Mom, Erma Bombeck, and Mark Twain

The Hardest Lesson I Ever Learned As An Assessor Was The Time: Make sure your house sketch closes before you leave the property.

If I Could Live In The Past For One Day, I Would Change: The day I did not sign up to join the Air Force in Communications. The military GIS/Computer knowledge would have been awesome.

My Best Friend: After all these years my husband and a set handful of fantastic friends who have supplied me with years of humor, guidance and support.

Chapter Notes and Other News

South Central Chapter

Please note the following dates for **South Central Chapter** meetings in 2008. Please feel free to pass this information along to anyone else in your office who attends chapter meetings..

Friday, March 28th - Adams County
Friday, June 6th - Cumberland County
Friday, September 12th - Dauphin County
Friday, December 5th - Franklin County

Erie County

New Manager of re-assessment is **John C. Engels, Jr., CPE**. The Reassessment Division will be a permanent Division of the Assessment Office beginning a reassessment in 2008 to be implemented in 2012. Erie County plans to continue to conduct cyclical reassessments. The Reassessment Division will be located off site for a time. New Director of Assessment is **Scott M. Maas, CPE.** Mr. Maas has been employed with Erie County for five and one-half years as an Appraiser. He was previously employed by CLT.

Patty Gallenstein, a Senior Appraiser in Erie County, is a first-time grandmother, as of November 19th. Her granddaughter's name is Grace.

AAP Board Launches Mission and Vision Project

At its most recent meeting, the AAP Board of Directors appointed a special committee to review and create a mission and vision statement for the association.

Named to the special committee were Randy Wagonner of Perry County, J.P. Fox, III of Berks County, Hap Rudolph, retired, Phil Light, retired and Terry Cochran, deputy director for AAP. A progress report will be made to the board at its April 29 meeting.

The board appointed the committee in anticipation of launching a full blown branding effort that will examine the members awareness of AAP and what it has to offer. The branding effort will be modeled after one now underway by the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania. CCAP created a branding report and recommendation for its own board about a year ago and has been implementing suggestions of that report. A copy of the CCAP branding report is available from Terry Cochran, *tcochran@pacounties.org*.

Info Com Ad

AAP Annual Conference

April 30 to May 2
Harrisburg Hilton

Watch for more information on registration and seminar offerings!

Legislative Update

Phil Light, AAP Government Information Chairman

This morning, as I was sitting in my kitchen enjoying a cup of tea and contemplating the joys and serenity of impending retirement, the Honorable H. William DeWeese, Democratic Floor Leader of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, must have decided that I had had enough fun for the day. Without any regard for the monumental occasion of my retirement, an article in which the Honorable leader was quoted, forced my thoughts to focus on the creation of this article which, by the way, was due a week ago (a deadline that went by without my notice because, you guessed it, I was thinking about RETIREMENT.

According to the Greensburg Tribune, Representative DeWeese had recently announced his legislative agenda. With that announcement came the Representative's pledge to push aggressively forward on such items as a new open records law, a statewide smoking ban and, of course, the ongoing discussions in the area of property tax reduction so important to counties and to assessment offices. Representative DeWeese went on to say that he believed a bill to eliminate (school) property taxes, by shifting primarily to sales tax along with an income tax increase, never came up for a House vote before the recess in December because the House had been preoccupied with other issues. Nonetheless, the Representative said that he is aware reducing property tax must be a top priority and that a broader bill to eliminate property tax might come up for a vote during the next few months. His comments made me think about items that might be of interest to us in this New Year and that in turn forced me to get busy writing this article.

The General Assembly has been occupied with other matters since the last update article. There has been relatively little movement on previously introduced legislation and a definite lack of originality in newly introduced legislation. House Bill 93 was up for its first consideration in November and recommitted to the Appropriations Committee in December. This bill is somewhat disturbing in that it would change the language of Act 91 of 1996 from authorizing cities of the first class to provide tax relief to certain persons to requiring them to offer it. Also moving slightly forward was House Bill 211, which would amend the Constitution by removing the financial need section of the disabled veterans' real property tax exemption act. Inching along are House Bill 949, House Bill 1188, Senate Bill 485 and Senate Bill 721 all of which deal with the Real Estate Appraisers Certification Act I in one way or another by changing the composition of the Board, raising civil penalties, creating new appraiser designations among other things. Also moving along in the House are Senate Bill 635, Senate Bill 636 and Senate Bill 709, which would remove the reference to elected assessors in various municipal codes. Pertinent to a recent AAP List Serve debate, Senate Bill 636 would also remove the assessor oath of office requirement. Wrapping up the barely moving section of this article is the infamous Senate Bill 777, which is now in the House. SB 777 would allow any municipality that passes an ordinance or resolution to collect their own delinquent taxes to be exempt from any procedure or provision of the real estate tax sale law including the obligation to make annual returns to the county tax claim bureau.

In the area of new legislation we have the new (sort of) House Bill 1489 introduced by Representative DeWeese and subsequently amended to include extensive language on school property tax reduction to be financed by a one-half percent increase to the state sales and use tax. Also part of the tax reduction discussions are: House Bill 1600 that would require school districts to grant a homestead/farmstead exclusion equal to an amount received from a state fund; House Bill 1947 and House Bill 1988 both of which deal with amending the constitution to increase the maximum amount of homestead/farmstead reduction from 50 percent to 100 percent of each property rather than the median of all property; House Bill 1951 that would eliminate senior citizen property tax; and, House Bill 1987 that would freeze senior citizen property taxes. Before we move to the Senate side, I should also mention House Bill 2018, which would require the county's tax assessment department to submit a detailed annual report on all tax-exempt property in the county, and House Bill 2091 that would require tax collectors to receive payments from escrow agents.

On the Senate side we have the tried and true method of Senate Bill 110, which calls for a state referendum during the 2008 general election that would authorize an increase in the state sales and use tax and the state personal property tax in order to reduce school property tax; Senate Bill 1163 that would prohibit school districts from collecting any taxes on homestead property for any purpose in any year following the ratification of a constitutional amendment allowing the prohibition, and also allowing the imposition of a graduated income tax to pay the school districts for the lost revenue. Last, but certainly not least, are the following bills: Senate Bill 1164, which calls for an emergency constitutional amendment to implement the provisions of the previous bill; and, Senate Bill 1165, which calls for a regular amendment to implement the provisions of Senate Bill 1163. Got that? I personally think it is somewhat scary.

However, back to the retirement issue as the clock on the wall now says that I am officially retired as my county action form states a retirement date of the close of business on the seventh day of January 2008. Therefore, I have to change my ending to read that if, for whatever reason, you feel an overwhelming desire to contact me I am now a very happy Phil Light, AAP Government Information Chairman, available by boat at any good fishing location or at plight61@comcast.net.



2008 CPE Classes

AAP will be offering two sets of CPE classes to prepare for the CPE exam. Information about both classes can be found on the AAP Web site.

Spring – Days Inn Penn State

Introduction	March 25 - 28
Site/Market	April 1 - 4
Cost	April 8 - 11
Income	April 22 - 25

Fall – Eden Resort Lancaster

Introduction	September 9 - 12
Site/Market	September 16 - 19
Cost	September 23 - 26
Income	September 30 - October 3

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2008 Annual Conference

It's time to start making your plans to attend the Assessors' Association of Pennsylvania's 2008 Annual Conference, April 30 to May 2, at the Hilton in Harrisburg this spring. This year's conference, our first ever in downtown Harrisburg, promises to be one of our best yet.

On January 24 the AAP Conference Planning Committee, chaired by Paulette Sebring, CPE and AAP Vice President from Monroe County, met to plan the classes and activities that will be part of this annual meeting. The committee has a great slate of classes planned that include USPAP, GIS Mapping, Valuing Income Properties, The Functions of the State Board of Certified Real Estate Appraisers, Surveying and a Legal Update by Al Hettinger. In addition to classes, the conference agenda leaves room for our annual education auction, Awards Banquet and our important general session where the membership will elect a new AAP secretary.

AAP is also planning to offer some chances to see the local sights while our members are in town. Currently, we are working on a trip to the National Civil War Museum located in Harrisburg, a tour of the state capitol building, plus other local museums and sites of interest. Conference registration materials will be mailed out in late February/early March.

Managing Conflicts In Any Situation

By
Andrew Sullivan
CEO Mazzitti & Sullivan

I think we all have had the experience of the coworker in your face, yelling at you, the tension so thick in your department you can "cut it with a knife," or the lack of communication that leads to duplication and lost productivity. These descriptions are just a sample of the conflicts we are faced with every day in our work life.

Conflict has two faces. On one side, conflict can actually be good when people do the following:

- Talk about their interests regarding the conflict,
- Develop understanding and empathy,
- Learn that there are many ways of how people view conflict.

When we are able to accept and utilize these skills, resolving conflict can lead to:

- Making a system better
- Producing innovative ideas
- Fostering teamwork and unity
- A positive behavior change

Conflict is bad when it continues without resolution or is ignored. We have all been in a situation where there is 600 pounds of elephant "doo doo" in the room, but no one wants to recognize it. This can result in the following behaviors or patterns:

- Accusations and threats
- One small problem becomes ten problems
- Specific problems become a gen eral blanket of negativity
- Sabotage in the workplace
- Whole departments or cliques form conflicted groups

When we see these negative conflict issues forming at work or in our private lives, people tend to give up, give in, or ignore the situation, which only drives the issue underground. People feel more stressed about coming into work or going into the conflicted situation. Absenteeism occurs and productivity is lost. People struggle with fear and hostility. Peoples' reactions to conflict result from both their family experiences and their innate personality. Understanding our conflict management style can help us learn where our "areas of need" are and lead us to change our behaviors in conflict situations. Simply put, we may not learn to like conflict, but we can learn how to manage it better. Researchers have determined that there are five styles of conflict management

