AAP Journal
Assessors' Association of Pennsylvania

Issue 2 Volume 6
An affiliate of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

CCAP County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania
Serving Counties Since 1886

Reassessment: Planning for Act 319

By James A. Hercik, CPE, GA
Director of Assessments
Fayette County

Sooner or later, that dreaded "r" word shows its face in every county. Most counties wait to be forced into a revaluation, but some are now taking a pro-active stance on reassessment. That is the wise choice, as reassessment is not to increase revenue, but to equally assign the tax burden to all property owners. As we are often told, the property owner only wants to pay their fair share, not someone else's. One result of reassessment is extreme interest in Act 319 as a way to avoid that higher tax bill most large land owners may face.

For counties that have not performed a reassessment for decades, chances are there is currently little or no interest in the Pennsylvania Farmland And Forest Land Assessment Act, (72 P.S. section 5490.1-5490.13), affectionately known as Clean & Green. This program, which was established in 1974 to protect and preserve farmlands, allows assessors to determine valuation based upon use, and not market value. The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture assists the assessor in establishing per acre rates for the various soil types in each of the 67 counties across Pennsylvania. Each and every year it publishes a report that is forwarded to the counties for their use in determining values. Counties may opt to determine their own valuations; however, they may not exceed the published rates. In recent years the majority of counties have now chosen to utilize the state rates as they would naturally be easier to defend in an appeal or a court challenge than if rates were determined internally.

Any county with a current Clean & Green program or one looking to establish it as part of a revaluation needs to create a Clean & Green Assessor position. This literally becomes a full-time job to administer properly all of the aspects of the program. From the initial valuation, the application process, the violation watchdog, to the roll back tax and penalties, it becomes an administrative nightmare for county assessors who attempt to do this "part-time." Counties are permitted to levy a charge for the Act 319 application process of not more than $50. This provision allows the county to recoup part of the expense of having a Clean & Green assessor and associated costs.

In beginning the process, an automated Geographic Information System (GIS) is essential. With the advent of faster, smarter computer programs, the subject property can now be "layered" over soil classification maps, and aerials from PAMap to establish the correct acreage breakdowns. Once the breakdown is established and the individual rates per

. . . continued page 8

IDEAS FOR YOU

Spread Employee Kudos

Praise for an employee's accomplishments can be a powerful motivational tool in the office, but it's even stronger when you publicize achievements beyond the workplace. When an employee does something outstanding, send a note to your trade publication and also to the employee's local newspaper.

One Easy Way To Generate Success Upon Success

When an employee successfully completes a project, make sure other employees learn from the experience. Ask the employee to hold a "project success meeting." During the meeting, the employee can walk co-workers through each stage of the finished project. Make sure the person outlines the various problems he or she encountered, as well as options considered and the solution that worked. Often, similar problems crop up in different projects.

WHAT'S INSIDE

The President's Report, Legislative Update, AAP People and more!

AAP OFFICERS

Randy Waggoner, CPE
President
Education Co-Chairman
Perry Co. Assessment Office
PO Box 37
New Bloomfield, PA 17068
(717) 582-2131
rwaggoner@perryco.org

Paulette Sebring, CPE
President Elect
Monroe County Assessment Office
Administration Bldg. Room 102
1 Quaker Plaza
Stroudsburg, PA 18360
(570) 517-3137
psebring@co.monroe.pa.us

James Hercik, CPE
Vice President
Fayette County Court House
61 East Main Street
Uniontown, PA 15401-3514
(724) 430-1350
jahercik@fayettec.rba.com

Steve Howe, CPE
Treasurer - Education Co-Chair
Dauphin County Assessment Office
112 Market Street
PO Box 1295
Harrisburg, PA 17108-1295
(717) 780-6101
showe@dauphinc.org

Christopher Savage, CPE
Secretary
Butler County Assessment Office
PO Box 1208
Butler, PA 16003
(724) 284-5320
csavage@co.butler.pa.us

Eric Brown, CPE
Immediate Past President
Wyoming County Assessment Office
1 Courthouse Square
Tunkhannock, PA 18657
(570) 996-2261
ebrown@wycopa.org

AAP COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Michael Piper, CPE
AAP Journal Editor
Board of Revision of Taxes
601 Walnut Street, Ste. 300
Philadelphia, PA 19106
(215) 686-9282
Michael.Piper@phila.gov

Jeff Laudenslager, CPE
Government Information
Chester County Assessment Office
PO Box 2748
West Chester, PA 19380
(610) 344-6107
jlaudenslager@chesco.org



President's Message

Happy Spring To All!

This will be the last president's message of my term as president of this awesome association. As I said in my last message in the last newsletter, I cannot believe how fast the year has gone. As the AAP prepares to promote a new president, I would like to say congratulations and good luck to Paulette Sebring, our next president. I would also like to say "thank you" to the slate of officers for their support, encouragement and willingness to get involved. I would like to thank the committee chairs for their hard work and support of the AAP.

As the legislature begins a new session, I am sure there will be movement of legislation that affects assessors. House Bill 208 has been provided to the Listserv from Maggie Hanshue at the Department of Agriculture for our review and comment. This bill has to do with the mining of gas and oil exploration. I hope that we will see our consolidated statutes legislation re-introduced. Maybe this time we will see it passed!

With March 1 came the processing of Homestead Farmstead and the headaches and heartaches that come with that program. I am starting to see activity on the Listserv picking up on this topic. Two board meetings ago, I gave a report in reference to a meeting that occurred at CCAP between officers and staff from the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, Doug Hill, Terry Cochran, Ed Rupert, Tom Hill and me regarding the handling of and processing of Homestead/Farmstead. Please contact an officer or your Board of Governors' representative for the specifics of the report on the outcome of the meeting. We all agree there are 67 counties and possibly 67 ways certain aspects of the program are being handled. The bottom line is that there needs to be communication between the assessment offices and their respective school district business offices.

In regards to the CPE classes, we had to change the fall class destination from the Mountain View Inn in Greensburg to the Holiday Inn Clarion. The Mountain View Inn notified AAP that they were closing their doors due to recent financial problems. The dates of the classes remain the same. Please check the AAP Web site, *www.paassessors.org*, for the dates and registration information *(see page four).*

One topic that comes up regularly at meetings of the Training and Education Committee is, "Is there any way that we can require that a student have one year of experience before sending them to the CPE classes?" The short answer is, "no." We can suggest that a student have some experience, however, to mandate one year could injure a county because they may not have a licensed person to value properties in compliance with the statutes if we make them wait a year. Take a moment to consider the affect on a student if they have been on the job less then a month and "bam," they are sent to class. It can be very overwhelming.

In closing, I would like to say thank you for all the support you have given me, and join me in congratulating our next president, Paulette Sebring.

Randy

Randy Waggoner

Reporting On The Issues That Impact Assessors!

By
Jeff Laudenslager
Legislative
Committee Chair

Legislative Update

News From Harrisburg

I hope that 2009 finds you all healthy and wise. We will gloss over the wealthy part by virtue of our profession and a financial market that has tanked, taking our deferred compensation accounts along with it.

With the start of a new legislative session in Harrisburg, I would like to bring you up to date on proposed legislation that may impact us.

House Bill 141 amends the Third Class County Assessment Law by providing for assessment appeals by adding that an attorney-in-fact under a power of attorney signed by a person who has the right to appeal to the Board of Assessment Appeals may file the appeal for the person and represent the person in all aspects of the appeal. Representation by an attorney-in-fact would not be construed as the unauthorized practice of law. The appeal of a Board of Assessment decision to the Court of Common Pleas would be a de novo (brand new) proceeding. House Bill 142 proposes the same for Fourth to Eighth Class.

House Bill 208 amends the Pennsylvania Farmland and Forest Land Assessment Act, further providing for split-off, separation or transfer by adding that the owner of property, subject to preferential assessment, may lease land covered by the preferential assessment for gas and oil exploration. Additionally, the owner of property subject to preferential assessment may utilize portions of the land covered by the preferential assessment for gas and oil drilling and extraction if the following conditions are satisfied: Each tract of land utilized does not exceed one acre, each tract of land so utilized is accessible and each tract of land is not sold or subdivided. Roll-back taxes would be imposed upon the tract of land utilized by the landowner for gas and oil drilling and the fair market value of the tract of land shall be adjusted accordingly. A lease of land would not be considered a subdivision under this subsection. The lessee of property used for gas and oil exploration or gas and oil drilling and extraction would be solely responsible for obtaining required permits in connection with any construction on a tract of land that it leases under this section for gas and oil exploration or gas and oil drilling and extraction.

House Bill 573 provides that under the Tax Abatement Limitation Act, no local taxing authority may authorize an exemption or certification of abatement on the payment of real property taxes to a homestead if the market value of the homestead is equal to or greater than $400,000.

. . . continued page five

Douglas E. Hill
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
17 North Front Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101
Phone: (717) 232-7554 x 3115
fax: (717) 232-2162
dhill@pacounties.org

Terry Cochran
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
PO Box 60769
Harrisburg, PA 17106-0769
Phone: 717 (526) 1010 x 3334
fax: (717) 526-1020
tcochran@pacounties.org

Lori Lawyer
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
17 North Front Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101
Phone: (717) 232-7554 x 3112
fax: (717) 232-2162
llawyer@pacounties.org

Debra S. Tingley, APR
DIRECTOR OF PUBLICATIONS
PO Box 60769
Harrisburg, PA 17106-0769
Phone: (717) 526-1010 x 3336
fax: (717) 526-1020
dtingley@pacounties.org

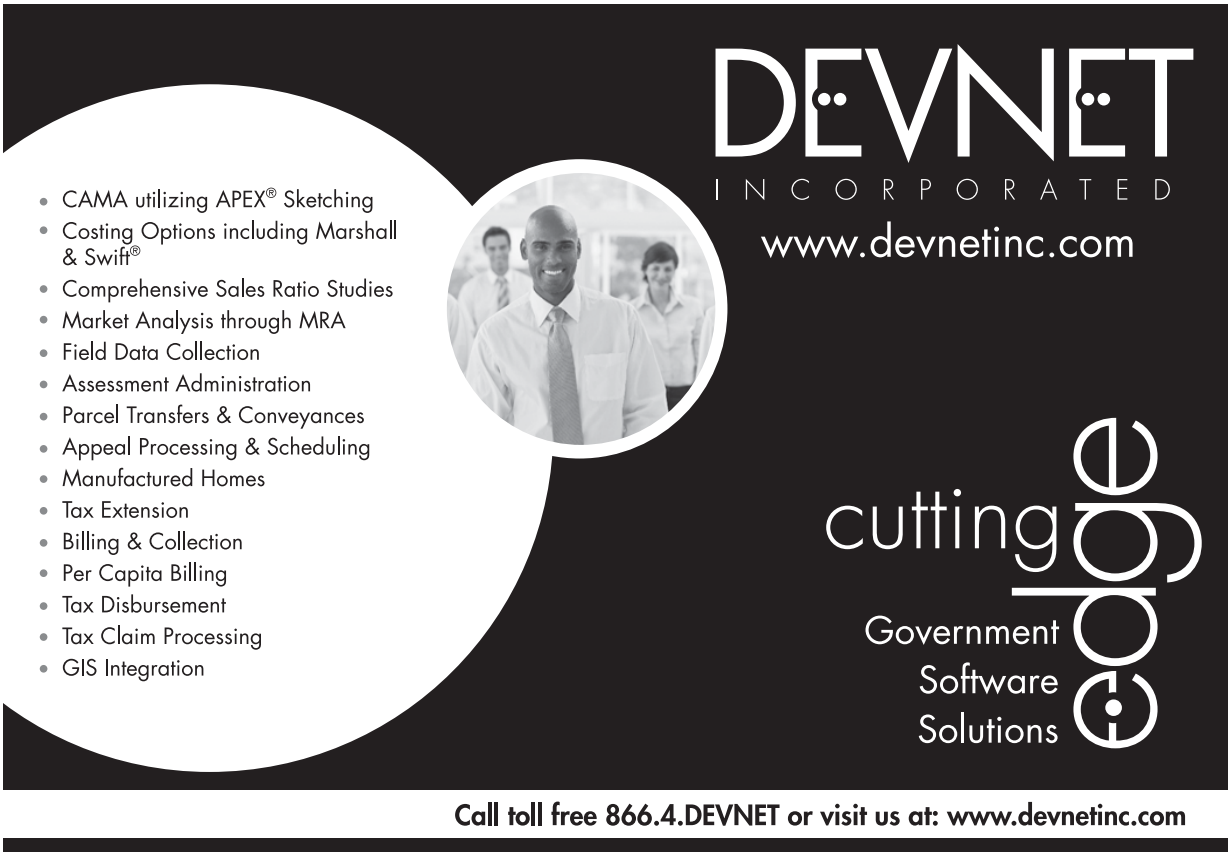
The *AAP Journal* is published four times a year.

DEADLINE for the Summer issue is June 4, 2009.

Article submissions are welcome. Send to:
Michael Piper, CPE
Journal Editor
Board of Revision of Taxes
601 Walnut Street, Ste. 300
Philadelphia, PA 19106
Phone: (215) 686-9282
fax: (215) 686-4336
Michael.Piper@phila.gov

Publications Disclaimer

The information provided in this publication is not intended to take the place of professional advice. Readers are encouraged to consult with competent legal, financial, or other appropriate professionals. Statements of facts and opinions expressed in this publication, by authors other than Association staff and officers, are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent an opinion or philosophy of the officers, members and staff of the Assessors' Association of Pennsylvania. No endorsement of advertised products or services is implied by AAP unless those products or services are expressly endorsed, or are owned or managed by the Association programs, or our affiliates. This publication may not be reproduced, modified, distributed, or displayed in part or in whole, by any means, without advance written permission of AAP. Please direct your requests to Debra S. Tingley, APR. *Note:* As part of its copyright agreement, the AAP grants the author the right to place the final version of his/her manuscript on the author's home page, subject to AAP's standards, or in a public digital repository, provided there is a link to the AAP Web site.



2009 CPE Classes— Note Location Change

The 2009 CPE classes have been scheduled in both the eastern and western part of the commonwealth. Expect to see registration materials for each set of classes about two months before the start of each class. These classes are the training and preparation courses for anyone planning to sit for the state's CPE examination. **AAP recommends that anyone taking these classes have at least one year of assessment experience.**

Spring — Best Western Mountain Inn — Wilkes-Barre

Introduction	April 20 - 24 (expanded five-day format)
Site/Market Approach	May 5 - 8
Cost Approach	May 18 - 22
Income Approach	June 9 - 12

Fall — Holiday Inn — Clarion

Introduction	September 14 - 18 (expanded five-day format)
Site/Market Approach	September 22 - 25
Cost Approach	September 28 - October 2
Income Approach	October 6 - 9

Update continued from page three

House Resolution 93 is a concurrent resolution establishing a commission to study the commonwealth's fragmented system of property tax reassessment, compare it to the property tax reassessment system in Maryland and identify ways to improve the system in Pennsylvania, including the impact of adopting the Maryland system.

Senate Bill 426, the Senior Citizens Property Tax Freeze Act, states that any person who meets the eligibility requirements would be entitled to a real estate tax freeze and would not be required to pay any increases in property taxes in excess of the claimant's base payment. To be eligible for a tax freeze, a claimant must be 65 or older. Any person eligible for a tax freeze may apply for the freeze by filing with the taxing authorities the following documents: (1) statement of request for a tax freeze, (2) a certification that the claimant or the claimant and the claimant's spouse jointly are the owners in fee simple of the residence upon which the property taxes are imposed, (3) evidence that the claimant is 65 or older, and (4) receipts showing prompt payment of the current year's property tax liability. The Department of Revenue would, upon submission by local taxing authorities of documentation as the department may require, annually pay to local taxing authorities the amount of each claimant's increase in property taxes in excess of the claimant's base payment. The legislation would apply retroactively to tax years beginning January 1, 2008, and thereafter.

In July 2008 Governor Rendell vetoed Senate Bill 1247 and House Bill 1438, which would have amended the assessment laws to prohibit most appeals of property tax assessments by school districts and municipalities. The Governor indicated in his veto message that an absolute prohibition was inequitable. On that basis, the bills' sponsors have been working on a compromise rather than attempting an override. We are likely to see more activity on this issue in the coming months.

I hope this information is helpful. Be well and continue to do the excellent job you do in this very challenging profession.

Manatron, the Nation's Leading Provider of Property Software Systems and Services, is Proud to Have Served Customers in Pennsylvania Since 1992.

We know that giving our customers access to the latest technology is an essential ingredient to their ongoing success. From our first installation in 1969 until today, Manatron continually invests to produce the best solution-based products and services for our clients.

Always forward thinking, Manatron software currently provides over 1300 customers across North America with the power to manage over 20 million parcels while meeting the daily needs of their constituents.



MANATRON
The power to manage well.

Manatron Appraisal Services
4105 Executive Drive • Beavercreek, Ohio 45430
800.776.7227 • www.manatron.com



MEMBER ABILIA

Name: Patricia Rittenhouse

Position: Appraiser II

Years In Assessment Field: Nine

County: Bucks

Marital Status And Family: Married with three children (Tim 26, Brittney 20, Olivia 7)

What Irritates Me Most In The Assessment Business: Is the fact that some homeowners think they could change your decision pertaining to their assessment with the hint that they know someone in the political world

Most People Would Be Surprised To Know: That I own and ride my own Harley!

Biggest Challenge As An Assessor: With the real estate market being so bad, keeping uniformity with any new assessments being put through

First Job: I worked at a bingo hall in Philadelphia when I was 12. I served and delivered bingo cards to the patrons.

If I Couldn't Be An Assessor, I'd Be A: Nurse
If I Won Millions In The Lottery, I Would: Give some to charity, buy a bigger shore house on the bay and share the rest with my family

Favorite Vacation: Jamaica! The water and the people are awesome.

Favorite Food And Drink: There's nothing better than hot wings and ice-cold Miller-Lite.

Favorite Movie: Pretty Woman

Three People Living Or Dead That I Would Invite To Dinner: Princess Diana, Oprah and Hillary Clinton

The Hardest Lesson I Ever Learned As An Assessor Was The Time: I was called a liar by a homeowner. I was so insulted but I continued to converse with him. He only got more agitated. My supervisor finally took over the conversation.

If I Could Live In The Past For One Day, I Would Change: The day before my sister passed away. I would have insisted she return to the hospital. Some doctors do make mistakes.

My Best Friend: My husband Gregg

Chapter Notes And Other News

LAUREL MOUNTAIN
ALLEGHENY COUNTY

Allegheny County would like to congratulate their newest CPE, Melissa Fritschie. She transferred to the Assessment Department within this past year and diligently worked toward passing the CPE examination. Way to go Melissa and welcome to the team!

Allegheny County also would like to recognize their latest Trailblazer and Governor award recipients for their many years of service; George Ruscin with 20 years, Sarah Parise, Eric Wolfe and Cindy Zimecki with 30 years each. Sarah Parise is also retiring April 1, 2009 from her position as Commercial Supervisor. Allegheny County wishes her the best of luck in her new endeavors.

NORTHWEST
CRAWFORD COUNTY

Former Crawford County assessor Lawrence (Zeke) Echnoz passed away on November 19 at his home. He was an assessor in Crawford County for 38 years. He was 95.

ARMSTRONG COUNTY

On February 27, Becky Broad's husband, Bob, passed away at Armstrong County Memorial Hospital. Our thoughts and prayers are with Becky and her family.

Mike Renosky, chief assessor for Armstrong County, had back surgery on Wednesday, March 11. Everything went well and he should be back on the job in a few weeks.

SOUTHEAST
CHESTER COUNTY

The Chester County Assessment Office welcomes Marc Sorber, assessor, and Jonathan Schuck, assistant director.

PHILADELPHIA COUNTY

Philadelphia County Board of Revision of Taxes has announced the retirement of Rudy Sprinkle on February 27.

SOUTHCENTRAL
LANCASTER COUNTY

Congratulations and good luck to Bud Hohman, field assessor, who retired in January. Bud was employed with the county over 17 years. His wife is retiring in 2009, and they hope to have some time to relax and do some traveling. We hope Bud enjoys his retirement.

Congratulations to Dana Guyer and Linda Honeybone who have been promoted to field appraisers; both have taken CPE classes and hope to take their exam soon. The county is also saying goodbye to Director of Assessment Dee Dee McGuire who left the county on April 2 to take up her new position as the township manager for West Lampter Township, Lancaster County.

ADAMS COUNTY

Adams County has signed a contract with 21st Century Appraisals, Inc. to perform a reassessment with a base year of 2010.

CUMBERLAND COUNTY

Welcome to new assessors - Sara Dutrey and Doris Goodhart.

Cumberland County's Reassessment has been restructured for 2010. The county is wrapping up its property reviews and will begin its market analysis later this year.

CHAPTER EDUCATION

The Southcentral Chapter meets quarterly. Their next meeting will be held in June beginning with business meetings at 9:00 a.m. and seminars immediately after the meeting (approximately 9:30 a.m). All meeting are held 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.

The Laurel Mountain Chapter will be holding the GIS for Assessment seminar on April 17, 2009 at the Oakhurst Tea Room. The class is worth three credits and the instructor will be Jeff Kern. For additional information, contact Joanmarie Morgano, Allegheny County at (412) 473-3164.

. . . continued from page one

"When a violation occurs the assessor has a set period of time to react. Within five days of learning of a change to an enrolled property, the county assessor must calculate the roll-back taxes as well as the interest and cause such to be mailed to the property owner."

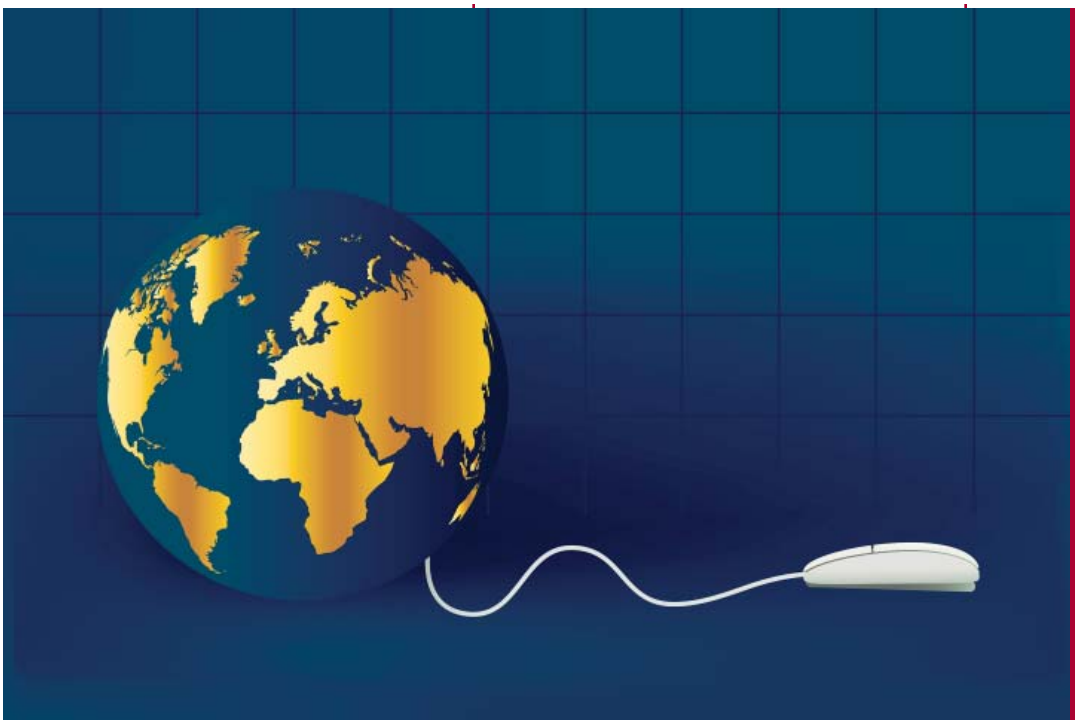
acre from the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture are inserted, the "use value" is determined.

The county is also required to set the normal "fair market value" and maintain that value as well as the various millage rates per year in case of a violation and roll back tax. Once the completed application is approved, it must be recorded in the Recorder of Deeds office and that deed reference number should also be captured on the assessment record. Further monitoring needs to be done as the property may be sold in the future to a new owner, or the property may be deeded to children. Once the ownership has changed, an amended application needs to be sent by the county assessor and signed by the new owner. That amended application is then also recorded. The county assessor should monitor deeds on a monthly basis to ensure these changes are made. The county should also maintain a separate layer in its GIS system of enrolled parcels, thus when a sub-division occurs to the subject parcel, it is immediately identified by the mapping department as occurring on an enrolled property, thus alerting the assessor to review the action.

When a violation occurs, the assessor has a set period of time to react. Within five days of learning of a change to an enrolled property, the county assessor must calculate the roll-back taxes as well as the interest and cause such to be mailed to the property owner. Roll-back taxes are calculated as the difference between the "fair market value" and the "use value" for up to a maximum of seven years. Interest is calculated at six percent per year. Property owners are required to notify the county 30 days prior to any change but in reality, none do this. Once the roll-back taxes and penalty are paid, the interest must be set aside in a separate account utilized by the county towards its state Agricultural Land Preservation Board. Those funds are used to acquire development rights from farmers to further ensure farm preservation. This is a part of the Agricultural Area Security Law (3 P.S. section 901-915).

As an example of what counties may experience during a reassessment program, Fayette County implemented a reassessment program in 2003. Prior to 2003 the county had 22 parcels enrolled in the program and had experienced only one roll back. After 2003 the county has 2,240 parcels enrolled, nearly 138,000 acres and has had between ten and 15 violations per year. Over $120,000 in roll-back taxes has been levied with over $15,000 being collected in interest. Numerous appeals have been brought before the Assessment Board and two in the Court of Common Pleas. Dozens of split-off's that comply occur each year. Each year property owners have the opportunity for new enrollment prior to June 1. In a reassessment year, the deadline changes to either 30 days from the final order of the county Board for Assessment Appeals or October 15, whichever date is sooner. This allows a property owner the opportunity to have any appeal on "fair market value" settled prior to enrolling in Act 319. This is an important aspect as any future roll-back taxes would be levied upon that new "fair market value."

Reassessment will come eventually to your county as will Clean & Green. Up front careful planning and adequate staffing will assure a smooth transition.



GIS And Assessors. . . Rediscovering Your Environment. A Look At Hot Technology That Is Reshaping What Assessors Do Each Day.

What Holds Us Together!

By Arthur Getis

When did you realize that maps and mapping are truly interesting things-sto create or use? The tremendous response to GIS over the last 20 years did not happen by chance. As children, when we matured from being self-centered individuals to externally oriented people, we developed a strong sense of place and a strong curiosity about the world around us. The spatial point of view was latent within us. Educational theorists have always said that a spatial perspective exists among all normal people. When we are still in diapers, we begin to sense where things are relative to where we are. But for most of us, as we develop into children and young adults, the spatial perspective is not tweaked. If no friend, teacher or relative helped stimulate that natural tendency or our circumstances limited the world that we could have possibly know, we might have said, as so many people have said in the past, "Geography is not one of my strong subjects" or "Maps don't mean much to me." Unfortunately, most people lacked that stimulus, but the readers of this article have been fortunate to discover GIS.

GIS, GPS, and the marvelous gizmos, gadgets, software, hardware and Internet sites virtually make the earth come alive. We have been exposed to this wonderful new technology and the software that allows us to explore our environments. Now we cannot get it out of our systems. If it is a location we are talking about, usually our first inclination is to check it out on a map. We have become spatially conscious, spatially aware, and geographically sensitized. We are thinking geographically. Our world is much fuller for these experiences. We had better understand the land, streets, paths, streams, patterns, networks, hills and slopes. They are ours. We meet a colleague or fellow worker and immediately launch into a discussion of how we can do something on the computer that will bring us even more understanding. This is done without skipping a beat. No need to start with first principles. One spatial thinker is interacting with another spatial thinker.

GIS and all of its related techniques and methods have helped open our geographic door. No, we "see everything," manipulate it, overlay it, add to it and make great prints of what we have created. One of the wonders of these discoveries and activities is that many of us earn our keep being professional spatialists. I use the word spatialists purposefully, because it is by virtually manipulating earth space that we have tweaked our natural tendency to develop our spatial cognitive abilities. "Spatial" has meaning to the extent that it is spatial concepts that hold us together and allow us to skip all the preliminaries and get right to our interaction with the earthy, with maps, and with colleagues.

. . . continued next page

GIS continued from page 9.

It is easy to say that we are in the same geographic boat, but it is a challenge to try to deconstruct that boat and find what keeps it floating. What elements of spatial structure let it sail unimpeded? I am going to try it, attempting to put into words why we are all in this together.

The first construct is our development, by nature and experience, of a sense of distance and direction that corresponds to real distances expressed as some measure, such as in the next block, halfway down that road, 200 feet north, second light on the left, 100 kilometers after the intersection, east for about five minutes, and so on. If we are called on to express these distances time and again, we become better and better at it and thus become more accurate and more concise. We develop a vocabulary of locations and distances. It may include latitude and longitude, cardinal or polar projection directions, or some specialized and coordinate language. If we are rarely in a position to think of distance and direction, we will not develop our ability to be anything more than general and thus will often be mistaken in our perceptions. But when we view maps day after day and are called on to estimate or give the exact distances from here to there, we become good at it. When we have marvelous technological tools to help with the process, we no longer say "100 meters south" when we mean "125 meters at 210 degrees." So the experience of working with maps leads to our discovery of spatial relations, which in turn gets our spatial perspective going in high gear.



"When we have marvelous technological tools to help with the process, we no longer say "100 meters south" when we mean "125 meters at 210 degrees." So the experience of working with maps leads to our discovery of spatial relation."

The second construct is what might be called the "nearness principle." We are better at discussing nearby conditions and situations than those far away. This might be considered the experience or repetition factor. If you see it enough, read about it enough, or hear about it enough, it becomes part of your psyche. Of course, that has always been the case, but now, with all of the tools available to us and our newfound appreciation for distance and direction, the nearness principle takes on great meaning. Many of us have become specialists in ferreting out the problems of our home area, such as environmental issues, public service issues, planning issues, and so forth. We are entrusted with making these issues clear so that they can be acted on. Our knowledge of place, especially our home place, has increased significantly. We see spatial relations, such as the effect that a new highway might have on drainage, in clear, concise ways.

The next construct comes from field experience: the travel factor. Some children are glued to their handheld devices as their family vehicle winds its way through the countryside. Traveling at 75 miles an hour in a car does not lend itself to gazing out the window. But distance and direction, the nearness principle, and our more conversant knowledge of the landscape have led us onto trails and into never-before-seen towns and city neighborhoods. The number of campers, hikers, sailors and tourists has increased greatly in the last 20 or so years. Much of that increase corresponds to the ever-increasing use of the computer hardware and software related to our GIS interests, including portable GPS instruments. Hikers with this technological experience do more than identify elements of the landscape. They observe differences in the land due

INFOCON CORPORATION
Celebrating 33 Years 1976 - 2009
172 Gateway Road, P.O. Box 568
Ebensburg, Pennsylvania 15931-0568
Telephone: (814) 472-6066, Fax: (814) 472-5019
E-Mail - infocon@ic-access.com Web Site - www.infoconcorporation.com
Providing County, School and Municipal Governments.....
Consulting
Tax Printing Service
Tax Claim Services
On-Line Computer Services
Tax Collection Services
Forms and Supplies
Document Imaging Services
Microfilm Services
Digital Scanning Services

to changes in elevation, rainfall, geologic structure, new buildings, changed traffic patterns, networks of interaction, and so forth. Consequently, those of us fortunate enough to use GIS regularly get so much more from field experiences than those unable or unwilling to put down their cell phones or other distractions.

Next is the spatial pattern factor. Dealing with maps on a regular basis stimulates thinking about the peculiar configurations of our environments. We are aware of flow between places, clustering of objects, densities, intensities, and magnitudes. This leads naturally to an appreciation of spatial relationships. What kinds of things are associated with other things and to what extent is there interaction between them? An example of this is a traffic pattern – the need for commuters to live within a reasonable distance of their homes. What spatial associations and spatial interactions occur because of the need to go to work? When we view the complexity of commuting for a single person or for many individuals, our GIS background allows us to view this in a spatial framework. No wonder traffic experts have strong GIS experience.

We have what we might call the difference factor. Of course, everyone knows that Mumbai, India, differs in many ways from New York City. GIS puts us in a better position to define those differences. Because we had better understand our local environment, we have meaningful benchmarks. Our knowledge of water levels in our streams during high runoff periods, temperatures in the canyons at 2:00 p.m., traffic tie-ups at rush hour, land values across town, local government dealing with various interest groups, and so on, helps us - when we are faced with the facts of the other place – assess the differences between here and there. This is our newfound ability to become comparative spatialists. Knowledge of an issue is not complete until we have some way to evaluate it. Let us use an Internet mapping tool or manipulate our GIS functions to bring this "extra knowledge" to bear on the problem. Spatialists are open to comparisons, since their perspectives allow for a sense of what it is like elsewhere.

Finally, I must include a particularly important nonspatial factor: computers. Were it not for our ability to manipulate this ever-advancing technology, and our constant use of computers, the chances of developing our spatial tendencies would be limited. But when the entire package is put together, we find a level of congeniality that brings a high amount of enthusiasm and dedication.

In the field of geography, the spatial principles and factors come under headings of spatial interaction, distance decay, gravity models, spatial autocorrelation, scale and others. All of these can be formalized into topics, subtopics, statistics, and models. Geography is like many subjects, such as economics, where supply and demand can be reduced to a series of equations. What is important, however, is that the foundation is laid for any further study of a field of knowledge. We are, or are becoming, GIScientists. Before the advent of the GIS revolution, our task in ferreting out the complexities of the world was very difficult, but now we have laid the spatial foundation. We think spatially. We are on the same ship held together by the same structures.

About The Author

Arthur Getis, distinguished professor of geography emeritus at San Diego State University in California, is author of many books and papers ranging across the geographic spectrum. He was awarded distinguished scholarship honors by the Association of American Geographers and the North American Regional Science Association. He served as president of the University Consortium for Geographic Information Science and an editor-in-chief-of the Journal of Geographical Systems.



An affiliate of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

Serving Counties Since 1886

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA

17 North Front Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101
(717) 232-7554
FAX: (717) 232-2162

Some partnerships are just meant to be.

In fact, many of our client partnerships span more than 25 years. Nationwide, Tyler clients trust our *Appraisal & Tax solutions*—now and well into the future.

- Track detailed information
- Record pre-payments and mass convert
- Generate property views with ESRI® mapping software
- Establish defendable cost, market, and income values
- Collect tax funds easily
- Perform tax settlement and distribution

Isn't it time you partnered with Tyler?

Because **tyler***works.*

tyler
TECHNOLOGIES

info@tylertech.com | www.tylertech.com