AAP Journal
Assessors' Association of Pennsylvania

AAP
ASSESSORS' ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA

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CCAP COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA
Serving Counties Since 1886

An affiliate of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

KNOWLEDGE, YOUR KEY TO SUCCESS

Tony Alu, Director of Assessment, Luzerne County

Working in a tax assessment office is a difficult job! Just think about it! Depending upon the position you currently hold within the assessment office, your knowledge and expertise are tested on a daily basis. As a tax assessment professional you deal with challenges every day that force you to demonstrate expertise not only in tax assessment matters, but also professional skills such as tact, diplomacy, discipline and courage.

As a Certified Pennsylvania Evaluator you must prepare for your day by accumulating everything you need to make you successful in your quest to gather the important information needed to make an intelligent, defendable decision as to a parcel's market value. Make sure you have your maps, camera and measuring tape! At your destination you may be confronted by an angry dog or any other pet but they usually are not as bad as the real danger, the property owner, who will be demanding to know the purpose of your visit. This is where you prove your value by using all your accumulated knowledge and skills to explain the purpose of the visit and to educate the individual as to the process and going about your business to diplomatically attain your goal.

The same is true for office staff - every day you prove your value by going about your assigned duties and handling problems that are complex and challenging. This requires not only the ability to handle the public but because of the complexity of tax issues, you must also work within a team to solve the problem at hand whether it be by consulting the mapping/GIS area, the field investigator or even going to the recorder of deeds office to review documentation. Addressing problems usually entails consulting other professionals to rectify the situation. I've never really seen an easy tax problem! Every office employee is the face of the office and the county to the public and we all must continually work on our customer relations and relationships within the office to provide the best service possible.

The chief assessor must wear many hats. They act as boss, coach, teacher, confidant, coordinator and anything else needed to make the office work successfully at that particular time in this fast-paced

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Don't Miss Out!

24TH ANNUAL
PA GIS CONFERENCE
MAY 16-18, 2016
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CONFERENCE CENTER HOTEL

PENNSYLVANIA GIS CONFERENCE

About the Conference
Whether you work in government, academia or the private sector, there is something for you at the PA GIS Conference. Each year, more than 200 GIS professionals from all parts of the Commonwealth gather in one place to network, to share experiences, to learn from one another and ask questions of industry experts. The Conference is about more than sessions and keynote speakers; it is about community. Come join us.

About Us
The PA GIS Conference is supported by staff of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP). The Planning Committee consists of representatives from the Pennsylvania geospatial community.

Mark your calendar! Online registration will open on Monday, February 22 at 10 a.m.

What's Inside

President's Message, Legislative Update, latest County Corner, AAP People

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President's Message

Happy New Year, AAP! I hope you all enjoyed your holidays and you are anxious to start another year of assessing.

Our Fall Conference at the Omni Bedford Springs seemed to be quite a success. The speakers need to be commended for their presentations. We all came back with new information and ideas to better ourselves and our offices.

Tony Alu reminded his class "if you find yourself digging a hole….STOP DIGGING."

Deb Crawford's real life experiences in Tioga County left us with no doubt she IS the Queen of Clean and Green!

Then we had the shed ladies, Joan Righter Price and Danette Magee … add the shed, delete the shed … delete the shed, add the shed! What's next ladies?

JR Hardester tried hard to find a few ghosts, unfortunately all he found was some very expensive root beer!

I did hear that someone found some secret hallways by accident, no, not by accident, by not reading the elevator where it said "NO ACCESS." I guess after teaching USPAP all day one might be a little ditzy!

At any rate, if you were able to attend any part of the Conference, please remember to fill out the survey. We do review your comments and concerns at the conference planning meetings to try to better accommodate everyone.

Our annual conference is scheduled for May 4 to 6 at the Hilton Harrisburg. I hope to see you all there. I'll be the one wearing the crown!

Here's a little something to think about…. there are 12,787,209 people in Pennsylvania and only 545 of them are CPE's! How's that for job security?

Let's make 2016 the best year ever!

Peace to all!

Your Highness,

Melissa



Legislative Update

By Jonathan B. Schuck, Co Chair
Government Information Committee and
Director of Assessment/Tax Claim, Chester County

Greetings fellow assessment professionals throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. By the time you receive this issue of the AAP Journal, we will likely have celebrated Thanksgiving, Christmas and the new year. The 2015-2016 session is nearly half over and our elected officials and their staffs have not been idle. Since January 2015, 2690 bills and 855 resolutions have been introduced. Of course, not all this activity is assessment related - 26 House bills, 22 Senate bills and 1 Senate resolution will potentially impact our professional lives.

Since the prior Legislative Update as of June 1, there has been limited legislative activity due to the on-going budget negotiations. New bills have been introduced pertaining to many areas of property tax reform and relief but little has moved beyond initial committee consideration. Following are highlights for those who enjoy the details and do not mind a temporary spike in heart rate and blood pressure. Wishing each of you a prosperous and productive new year!

Senate Bill 785

This amendment was introduced to change the language of what buildings can be assessed and valued. The intent is to mitigate the effect of Judge Leadbetter's decision on the valuation of sheds (Pederson v Monroe County Board of Assessment Appeals). The current version provides for a limited exemption for a "de minimis" structure of 200 square feet or less as well as certain agricultural buildings of 1,000 square feet or less. Passed 46-1 in the Senate on September 29 and currently in the House Appropriations Committee as of November 10. Note that House Bill 912, a companion bill, was defeated June 30.

Senate Bill 877

This amendment sets very specific conditions under which a taxing district can appeal a property assessment. They may not appeal based on a sale of the property. They may only appeal under one or more of the following conditions: after a countywide reassessment, after a property has been divided and conveyed away in smaller parcels or there is a change in the productive use of the property or parcel by material alteration in the nature of the use or through alterations or additions that modify the use. A property which was appealed in violation of this amendment would have nine months from the passing of the amendment to appeal and have its value returned to the prior value. Taxing districts would not be eligible for a refund of taxes paid in prior years. Currently in the Senate Appropriations Committee as of June 29.

Senate Bill 1010

This amendment would assign responsibility for a number of functions pertaining to the administration of the Homestead program to the Department of Revenue. The department would take over mailing applications to eligible parcel owners that are not enrolled, receive reports from the Assessor's office and the Recorder of Deeds, design and maintain the application form, mail annual notices notifying enrolled property owners about the property tax relief to be received, place information about the program on the state income tax return and by November 1, 2020 submit a report to the General Assembly on the state of the program. Currently in the Senate Finance Committee as of September 25.

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Deadline for the Spring 2016 issue is March 7, 2016

Article submissions are welcome.
Please send to:
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Philadelphia County
Journal Editor

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Knowledge

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environment because the office must function as a single unit. The assessment office is a team and just like any other team, the chief assessor is tasked with bringing it all together to achieve the desired result efficiently and economically. As chief assessor you must continually monitor the office and bring all the different areas and personalities together by making the necessary adjustments to not only accomplish the requirements set by law, but to also get the most out of your staff. As chief assessor you must teach, as knowledge is the key to success for both the chief assessor and their staff!

EVERY DAY THAT YOU DO NOT LEARN SOMETHING NEW IS A MISSED OPPORTUNITY!

As chief assessor you are also chief teacher and if you have nothing else left to teach (hard to believe in this profession) you must find ways to educate and improve your staff by expanding to outside sources such as seminars, shifting jobs, etc. A chief assessor's day is challenging and time is important but in my opinion the best time that you spend during the day is side by side with the staff! This is the best position to keep abreast of your staff's moods, challenges and to get a clear picture of what the customer is seeing.

As a tax assessment professional you must have a deep understanding of a subject that challenges most people. Attending the CPE classes to prepare you for your test is a great start. The continuing education required to maintain your license and the list serve are great teaching tools also, but don't let your education stop there always strive to continually improve your knowledge of tax assessment. Learn all you can, look at every problem as an education, invest in yourself, make friends throughout our organization and feel confident that you are up to any challenge that will come your way.

Tony Alu is also an AAP past president and currently serves on the Assessment Law and Conference Planning committees.

Legislative Update

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House Bill 613

This act would supplement the Improvement of Deteriorating Real Property or Areas Tax Exemption Act and the LERTA Act. Properties adjacent to "blighted areas" which might not otherwise qualify could be eligible for a tax exemption which is reduced over a 10 year period. The first 3 years are 100% exempt, the following years the exemption declines to 90%, 75%, 60%, 45%, 30%, 15% and 10% before the exemption terminates. Passed 191-0 in the House on May 13 and currently in the Senate Appropriations Committee as of June 26.

House Bill 321

This amendment would make the Assessors Certification Act apply to counties of the first class. Assessors employed by a county of the first class would have three years to become certified under the act. Passed 199-0 in the House on October 6 and currently in the Senate Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee as of October 9.

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AAP People & Chapter News

North East Chapter

The chapter is pleased to announce its officers for 2016 -
President: **Annie Shaffer**, Wyoming County
Vice Present: **Tony Alu**, Luzerne County
Secretary/Treasurer: **Kelley A. Cosner**, Wyoming County

Congratulations to the chapter's new CPEs - **Bill Andress**, Northampton County. **Marcy Kleckner**, Schuylkill County and **Samantha Wickizer**, Susquehanna County.

2016 chapter meetings and locations:
- April 22 - Luzerne County
- June 17 - Wyoming County
- September 16 - Lackawanna County
- December 2 - Monroe County

North West Chapter

Best wishes to **Brenda Vincent**, Chief Assessor, in Forest County who retired after 39 years with the county.

The chapter also has several new CPEs - **Jennifer Marburger**, Lawrence County; **Jeanne Englert**, Armstrong County; and **Amber Bracken**, Cambria County!

The new chapter officers for 2016 are:
President: **Rita Yannayon**, Erie County
Vice President: **Joe Galbo III**, Crawford County
Secretary: **Amy Francis**, Erie County
Treasurer: **Chad Cochran**, Venango County
Board of Governors: **Emily Weiser**, Clarion County (July 2016)

South Central Chapter

The South Central Chapter meets quarterly in March, June, September and December, beginning with a business meeting at 9 a.m., with seminars immediately after the meeting and are held at the Adams County Agricultural and Natural Resources Center in Gettysburg. Please contact Barb Walter at (717) 337-9837 for more information. The next meeting is March 18, 2016.

SCCAAP Officers for 2016
President: **Jodi Martin**, Franklin County
Pres Elect: **Ted Conley**, Lebanon County
Vice President: **Dave Appleby**, Adams County
Treasurer: **Holly Martz**, Dauphin County
Secretary: **Rachael Perring**, York County

Allegheny County

The county has several new CPEs - **Carolyn Brooks, Michele Cipcic, Mary Beth Snyder,** and **Karen Backus.**

Congratulations to the county's two new assessors - **Sherri Dadey** and **Jenifer O'Brien**.
Best wishes to assessor **Lori Klein** who welcomed her son Wyatt this past November.

Dauphin County

Welcome to **Dennis Kent**, the newest member of the Dauphin County Tax Assessment/Appraising Team.

Clarion County

Congratulations to **Emily Weiser** and her husband Brandon on the birth of their son, Paul Francis Weiser, who was born on June 24, 2015!

Chester County

Congratulations to the county's latest CPEs - **Ruth Troop** and **Tom King!**

Montgomery County

Robert Wright is the county's newest CPE! Congratulations!

Philadelphia County

Congratulations to Philadelphia's newest CPEs - **Jenay Byard, Sharon Clements,**

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Barbara Walter
Chief Assessor and Assistant Director of Tax Services
Adams County

Years in assessment field: 42 and I started when I was 10 years old, in case you are doing the math, (just kidding!!!)

Marital Status and family: I am married to Tom and we have two great children. Our son Chris and daughter Jamie, along with our son-in-law Jason; two granddaughters, Jenna 7, Jerica 5 and grandson Bentley 2; my Mom, four sisters and their families, lots of nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

What irritates me most in the assessment business: When the person posing the question won't wait and listen to the answer and the fact that people don't understand that we are just doing our jobs.

Most people would be surprised to know: I am really kind of shy and have to force myself to be outgoing, especially around new people. I know some of you are hysterically laughing – thinking Barb Walter, shy??? See, it really was a surprise!

Biggest challenge as an assessor: Remaining cool and calm when working with an irate person to influence them to become cool and calm. My challenge has always been to have the angriest person leave with a smile on their face or at least satisfied that they received answers to their questions. They may not like the answers, but at least they got answers. I hope that most of our customers leave feeling that way.

First Job: Milk Girl When I was about eight or nine years old, my Dad was a Pennsupreme rural delivery milkman – my sisters (there were six girls in my family) and I helped him deliver milk to homes in several of our local communities – we were known as the "milk girls", we knew everyone in these communities and it was good times.

If I couldn't be an assessor, I'd be: High School American History teacher

If I won millions in the lottery, I would: give money to my family, make sure there was money for my grandchildren's education, give money to nonprofit organizations that I support and then think about what to do about the rest.

Favorite food and drink: I love to cook, when I have time, and to eat; the list of un-favorite foods is much shorter than the list of favorites. I was brought up having to take some of everything and everything I took I had to eat. This forced me to try all foods and not waste food, so I have a lot of favorites.

Favorite vacation: Vacations with my family

Favorite movie: I love to watch Christmas movies, new and old; I never miss a year of watching "It's a Wonderful Life". I love old movies, John Wayne movies and the Wizard of Oz.

Three people living or dead that I would invite to dinner: I would like to spend another dinner with my Dad, who passed away 14 years ago, my sister Bonnie who died suddenly when she was 28 years old and my grandparents.

If I could live in the past for one day, I would change... I really don't think I would change anything, but I guess I would have slowed down the time with my kids when they were growing up - that time went so fast! If I knew then what I know today, I would have appreciated my childhood more and not wish my life away – how many of us have said "can wait until I am old enough to do _____." Guess what, we could have waited, because once we did it, it didn't seem all that great!

My best friend: I am so lucky to have a lot of very good friends, some I have known my entire life, many since elementary and high school, others I've made along the way. I have also made a lot of great friends while working at the county and through the Assessor's Association; they all have a special place in my life…..

What I like best about my job: Best thing I like about the job is getting to work with so many great people and the public. And I hope at the end of the day, I made a difference.

AAP
ASSESSORS' ASSOCIATION OF PENNSYLVANIA

MEMBERABILIA

AAP People

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Philadelphia County *continued*

Alisa D'Ambrosia, Melodi Emeran, Robin Enoch, Ian Figueroa, Christine Gerhardt, Taylor Leigh Gordon, Darien Graham, James Hajdinaj, Bob Kalatschinow, Mitch Lieberman, Melanie Murray, Karen O'Brien, Samantha Schmidt, Lakena Smith, Bernice Washington, Christine White and **Terez Wood.**

York County

Congratulations to **Rachel Perring**, Director of Assessment and Tax Claim who is the county's newest CPE.

Send Your Chapter & County News!

Don't forget to send your county or chapter news for the next *AAP Journal.* Our next deadline is **March 7**.

Please send your news to **Terry Cochran** at *tcochran@pacounties.org.*

AAP Education Calendar

Spring 2016 CPE Classes - CCAP Office, Harrisburg
Intro - March 7 – 11
Site/Market - March 15 – 18
Cost - April 4 – 8
Income - April 12 – 15

2016 AAP Annual Conference
May 4 - 6, Hilton Harrisburg, Harrisburg

Fall 2016 CPE Classes - Ramada Inn, State College
Intro - September 19 – 23
Site/Market - September 27 – 30
Cost - October 3 – 7
Income - October 11 – 14

County Corner!

Kendall Scott Phillips, CPE
Assistant Director of Assessment, Fayette County

Fayette County was founded in September of 1783. A young Virginian saw first hand the importance of the area now known as Fayette County in 1753. His name was George Washington. Washington and frontiersman Christopher Gist and some others traveled through the area to deliver a message from the British to the French to vacate the territory. The French refused. The following year Washington returned with a small force to build a road to what is now Brownsville, PA. While encamped in an area now called Jumonville, which now holds the Jumonville Cross, Washington got word that a detachment of French soldiers was nearby.

Little did Washington or the French know that the events that would unfold the next day, May 28, 1754, would change the world forever. A conflict would erupt between the British and French for control of not only the region, but for all of North America. That conflict would begin in an area in Jumonville, also called Fort Necessity, which today is visited by thousands each year. The events that occurred that day would lead to the first world war known as the French and Indian War and the Seven Years War.

A year later in 1755, a large force of British soldiers under the command of Major General Braddock set out to remove the French from their fort located at present day Pittsburgh, PA. Although the British failed miserably in their attempts to eliminate the French, the road they constructed would live on as Braddock Road, currently called National Pike, which was the largest engineering feat of its time and would serve as the gateway to a new continent. By the 1800's Fayette County was bustling and somewhat civilized as compared to what only a few years earlier was the frontier wilderness.

The county's rich historical heritage is not only related to events and economics. The spectacular natural beauty and wonderful tourist attractions are some reasons Fayette County is truly an exciting place to visit. Whether it's a walk along the Youghiogheny River at Ohiopyle State Park, a visit to Fort Necessity National Battlefield, Frank Lloyd Wright's Falling Water or Kentuck Knob, you can feel that pioneer spirit that helped shape the United States. After all, the events that occurred and the lessons learned by the young Virginian in the backwoods of Fayette County would serve him well some 20 years later in a struggle for freedom for the United States. He would become the nation's first president - George Washington.

Unique Fayette Facts

- Uniontown was the birthplace of the Big Mac in 1967.

- Fayette County was actually named after the Marquis de Lafayette who fought beside Washington in the Revolutionary War.

- History is everywhere in the county- 50 historic markers, 50 historic buildings and sites, five national historic landmarks, the birthplace of George Marshall and 15 historic districts.

- The outdoors and nature plays a big role in this county. It's home to two national parks, Pennsylvania's largest state park and Pennsylvania's largest cave.

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