



# TAX WISE NEWSLETTER

Assessor  
Auditor-Controller  
Treasurer Tax Collector

*Coordinated by Ray Rasmussen*

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## HAPPY NEW YEAR!

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*--By Ray Rasmussen, Auditor-Controller's Office*

Greetings from the Property Tax Administration Departments of Stanislaus County! This is our third annual newsletter sent to taxing agencies within Stanislaus County. Our goal is that the newsletter will assist you in keeping abreast of developments in property tax administration in the State and locally, here in our County.

We encourage your feedback as to how the newsletter is meeting your needs and/or would welcome suggestions for improvement. An electronic version containing links to further information is available by contacting Denise Alarcon at 525-6596 or via e-mail at [alarend@mail.co.stanislaus.ca.us](mailto:alarend@mail.co.stanislaus.ca.us).

We will continue to strive to meet your needs and are determined to give you the best customer service possible.

### PROPERTY TAX ADMINISTRATION DEVELOPMENTS

Since the last newsletter, the County has fully implemented our new property tax administration system. The Auditor and Tax Collector switched over to the new system in May and the Assessor's Office has been on the new system since July. Staff in each of the departments have attended training classes and have also networked with other counties in California using the same system. Despite these proactive measures, we still experienced a few bumps in the road.

You may have read the article in the Modesto Bee that suggested tax bills would not be going out on time. The same article also mentioned a backlog of supplemental tax billing. I am happy to report to you that the bills were mailed out timely and the backlog of supplemental bills has been eliminated.

The new system has given us the ability to process roll changes and mail corrected bills more timely.

It will also give us enhanced capabilities in regards to collecting and apportioning delinquent taxes. This means that once we have become not only fully operational, but also fully using all the functionality of the new system, that taxes should be collected and apportioned more efficiently and credited to you sooner.

More information on the property tax administration system can be found on the [Megabyte Systems website](#).

There has been some legislative activity that may affect some taxing agencies in Stanislaus County. [SB1049](#) will allow the California Department of Forestry to raise \$50 million statewide by placing a direct assessment on parcels in areas of State Responsibility. The \$70 assessment for 2004/05 will be placed on approximately 5,000 parcels in the County, mainly in the extreme western and eastern portions of the County. These assessments may generate some calls to local fire protection districts that also place an assessment on the parcels.

Also looming on the horizon is the "triple flip." Beginning in 2004/05, the State budget package temporarily redirects a share of the local sales tax (equal to one-half of 1 percent of taxable sales) to the State to use to repay the deficit reduction bonds. The budget package offsets local sales tax losses (projected at \$2.5 billion for 2004/05) by redirecting to cities and counties a commensurate amount of property taxes from the Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund (ERAF). Increased State education apportionments, in turn, will mitigate K-14 district revenue losses associated with the redirection of ERAF monies. This swap of sales for property taxes continues until the deficit reduction bonds are repaid.

Finally, I am happy to report to our direct charge agencies that as an intermediary step to having available assessment and collection information on the Internet, we soon will have electronic versions of your detail collections report that we can email to you. John Bettencourt has worked on this and says that the information can be captured

for you either in Microsoft Access or Excel. He is going to write a few simple queries that will be available with the Access version. It should be ready to go for the 2<sup>nd</sup> apportionment of 2003/2004 scheduled for April 2004.

### **ASSESSOR'S UPDATE**

*By Doug Harms, Stanislaus County Assessor*

Our new county property tax computer system is here. And it could not have come at a better or worse time. It came at the worst time because facing budget cuts and staffing shortages, a computer conversion just added to our woes. It came at the best time because, hopefully, it will give us a more efficient tool to do more with less.

Unless you are the Assessor, Tax Collector, or Auditor why should you care about a new county property tax computer system? First, as tax payers you should care because the new system is saving us about \$56,000 a year during the first five years. It will take five years to pay the system off and after that the savings will grow to \$353,000 a year.

Secondly, the new system allows easier access to our information. This means we can provide more focused and timely reports than ever before. It also makes it possible, for those of you who work with databases, to download work appropriate tables that would permit you to create your own reports.

It also means we can post values and other information more easily to the Internet. In fact, values and other property information are currently available through the Tax Collector's and the Assessor's Internet sites. There are two levels of on-line access, the first requires that you know the assessor's parcel number to access the information and the second requires that you enter a user id and a password to access the information.

The first level, while easier to access, does not provide as much information as the second level. If you would like access to the second level of

information please contact the Assessor's office for further information.

Lastly, in the future we can link the new system to a geographical information system creating a new interface between spatial data (maps) and tabular data. This would make it possible for you to build new ways to look and relate to the data that is important to you.

Hopefully, the county's new property tax computer system saves the public money and also provides a more user-friendly way of looking at our data.

### **TAX COLLECTOR'S UPDATE**

*By Tom Watson, Stanislaus County Treasurer/  
Tax Collector*

The Stanislaus County Treasurer/Tax Collector's Office has taken a few good steps forward this past year. Implementation of the Megabyte Property Tax System has brought the dedicated resources of a private sector company that services 18 counties' property tax administration to bear on our tax collection needs. With the addition of a credit card acceptance vendor, EDS, we are poised to collect ever more money in a greater variety of ways.

The Megabyte system has completely automated the redemption ("back taxes") process, allowing taxpayers to know quickly and accurately what their back taxes are, not only today, but months out into the future so that they can plan to pay off all back taxes. This will help the Auditor-Controller's Office also to streamline the distribution process of the collection of back taxes. This is definitely a "win-win" for Special Districts and all parties involved.

Partnering with EDS that has already implemented credit card payment acceptance for property taxes collected in California counties such as Marin and Los Angeles, the Stanislaus County Treasurer/Tax Collector's Office was able to collect over \$400,000 in property taxes through this medium.

Increasing the ways in which taxpayers can pay property taxes helps in the overall collection process, which will mean collecting more money faster for Special Districts.

The Stanislaus County Treasurer/Tax Collector's Office continues to find innovative ways to meet its mission to aid all public agencies in helping to meet their financial goals.

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### **NEW FACES IN PROPERTY TAX**

#### **Todd Filgas, Auditor-Controller's Office**

Todd received his BS degree from Fresno State in March 1995. He spent 8 years in management for Sherwin Williams Paint and also went back to school at night to earn an MBA in Finance from CSU Hayward in March 2001. His wife, Bergen, is the supervisor of the Families in Partnership program with the Stanislaus County Child Welfare Department. They have a son, Griffin, in kindergarten and a daughter, Morgan, who is three years old. His hobbies include all things outdoors and particularly hiking, camping and four-wheeling.

Todd has a strong customer service background and is anxious to be of service to you. You may contact him by telephone at 209-525-7918, or by email at [filgast@mail.co.stanislaus.ca.us](mailto:filgast@mail.co.stanislaus.ca.us).



**Sharon Berry, Assessor's Office**

Sharon has spent the last ten years working in Accounting in the Medical Field. Part of that time was spent working in the Bay Area for a medical disability management firm as their Controller and Systems Manager. During that time she had fun participating in the craziness that resulted in computer conversions for "Y2K."

Away from work, Sharon likes to do fun things with friends and family like bringing in the New Year marching up and down her street beating on pots and pans.



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**CONTACT INFORMATION**

Do you have a question for the County about property taxes, but you're not quite sure whom to ask? Maybe we can help. Here are three people who are very knowledgeable about their respective departments and are anxious to be of assistance to you:



**Don Oppman**  
Assessor's Office  
(209) 525-7623  
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