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County benefits from collection of delinquent taxes

Judith McGinnis , Times Record News 5:49 a.m. CT March 15, 2017



(Photo: JOHN INGLE/TIMES RECORD NEWS)

With the help of a specialist law firm, a needed amount of long-unpaid county taxes have been collected.

"Perdue, Brandon, Fielder, Collins and Mott have done our office and more importantly the citizens of Wichita County a great job," said Tommy Smyth, Wichita County Tax Assessor-Collector. "Their staff and ours have worked very well together to reduce a significant amount of old tax debt that had not been addressed properly."

According to Smyth, it is a "blessing that about 99 percent of county citizens pay their annual property taxes on time."

"There is still a sizable amount of levy (an amount based on property's assessed evaluation) that is delinquent each year. It takes time and resourcefulness to get it collected before the next tax year," Smyth explained.

The process of collecting delinquent taxes continues. Tony Fidelie Jr., a PBFCM partner, described the 25 percent of delinquencies outstanding.

"Most taxes are turned over for collection in July of any particular year. In July 2016, \$2.53 million were turned over," he said. "By February 2017, the \$2.53 million had been reduced to \$1.32 million, a reduction of 48 percent in the first six months."

Of the remaining balance, 17 percent are in payment agreement set up by the Wichita County tax office. Fidelie said that 7 percent are in bankruptcy or deferrals. Deferrals are property owners over 65 or disabled who choose to defer their taxes.

"These taxes continue to accrue interest but collections are abated until the individual removes the deferral or it is removed at their passing," Fidelie said.

In the 2016 calendar year the firm filed law suits on 453 accounts, with judgments taken on 170 accounts, tax warrants issued on 132 accounts, and orders of sale were issued on 93 accounts.

Since 2013, the total amount of delinquent property taxes collected has continued to increase:

2013 - \$842,551.93

2014 - \$898,944.17

2015 - \$922,272.36

2016 - \$973,945.09

"The amount for 2016 is 'to date' as we are still collecting taxes that were delinquent as of Feb. 1, 2017," Smyth said. "These numbers are adjusted for the levy so we are over 100 percent every year when penalties and interest are added."

Taxing entities do not pay for the services of PBFCM; fees are generated by a collection penalty added to those delinquent for a period of time.

"It's always our goal to work with individuals who find themselves unable to pay timely. We know some members of the community find themselves in tough financial situations. We encourage them to reach out to us and contact the tax office to make payment agreements," Fidelie said.

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