



Auditor Harold Announces Tax Payment, Office Safeguards

For Immediate Release – June 30, 2011

With the second half tax season underway, Stark County Auditor Alan Harold has announced major recent improvements to the tax collection process. Harold states, "This type of announcement would usually be made by the County Treasurer; however, due to last week's unexpected Supreme Court ruling Mr. Zumber no longer holds office, the public deserves an update regarding the stewardship by Treasurer Zumber, his staff and my staff over the past six months. In that time, we all worked diligently as a team to strengthen safeguards, increase accuracy and improve service surrounding the tax collection process."

These new safeguards and improvements include:

- Checks received by the County Treasurer's Office are now cashed within two days of receipt. Previously, it was common for checks to be held for 6-8 weeks before being cashed. Frustrated taxpayers had no way of knowing whether their payment was ever received.
- Checks mailed to the County Treasurer's Office are now sent directly to a bank lockbox. Previously, checks were held in mail bins for 6-8 weeks before being cashed. This new process ensures tighter security, as well as better accuracy and accounting of taxpayer money.
- Tax payments received from the taxpayers now appear on the County Auditor's website within one week of receipt. Previously, the website was not updated to reflect paid taxes until 5-6 weeks after the tax deadline. Banks, title companies, realtors, and the public at large are now able to quickly verify that their tax payments have been properly received and posted.
- Enhancements to the phone system, which include:
 - A new queue to better direct incoming calls. All phone numbers now have a specific person assigned to them and there is no endless ringing loop; all phone numbers now accept voicemail messages and those messages are checked on a routine basis.
 - A standard for returning voicemail messages. The majority of such messages now are returned between the same day and 24 hours of receipt. All messages are tracked from inception to conclusion of the taxpayer's issue.
 - More employees are now answering calls directly. Previously, hold times could exceed two hours. That has now been completely eliminated.

In addition to these tax payment process improvements, our staffs have worked together to:

- Eliminate a disturbing two year backlog of real estate data entry. All routine data entry is now monitored on a weekly basis.



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- Improve the daily and monthly account reconciliation between the County Auditor and County Treasurer. Original back-up verification documentation is now required, along with a detailed accounting of all calculated formulas.
 - Decrease the amount of cash on hand at any given time in the County Treasurer's Office. Previously, hundreds of thousands of dollars and, at times over \$1,000,000 cash, were stored in the vault. Now, all cash is deposited into the bank daily, except for \$1,500 needed for cash drawers.

Harold adds, "These positive and long overdue changes have been implemented to preserve and protect taxpayer money in the best way we know how – by getting data input quickly and reported accurately, and most importantly by depositing the money in the bank immediately upon its receipt. It is my sincere hope that Mr. Zeigler, when properly authorized to return to office, will continue these common sense practices and enhanced safeguards which have been carefully designed and instituted to serve and protect the public."

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