

Auditors reach out on homestead exemptions

Written by Stephanie Groves
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This year's changes in the State Budget has impacted the Homestead Exemption, which is a form of property tax relief that results in a reduction in real estate taxes for those who qualify. The exemption is an additional reduction in real estate taxes beyond the other property tax deductions and rollbacks that property owners will continue to receive.

Allen County Auditor Rhonda Eddy-Stienecker said there has been a massive marketing push to get the information out to the folks who are not registered for the program.

"We created brochures and sent them out to social groups and passed them out at the Allen County Fair during Senior Citizen's Day," she said.

Eddy-Stienecker reported that at the end of tax year 2013, the county had 8,302 taxpayers enrolled in the Homestead Exemption, which saved taxpayers a total of \$3,300,581, an average of \$397 per year.

Putnam County Auditor Robert L. Benroth said the change in the law makes it harder for people to qualify.

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“Before, the exemption was age-based — those who turned 65 — or were permanently disabled were qualified,” Benroth said. “Now, it is income-based and includes individuals making a \$30,500 Ohio Adjusted Gross Income (OAGI) or less.”

Benroth explained that the taxpayer receives a discount up to \$25,000 in market value — \$8,750 assessed value – 35 percent — on their value and the tax savings varies depending on the tax rate in each district.

“For example, residents living in Ottawa are subject to taxes from the county, city, school district and township where they live,” Benroth detailed.

He said for tax year 2013, there were 2,565 taxpayers receiving the Homestead Exemption, which saved each taxpayer \$254.35 to \$400.25. The total homestead reduction for the county was \$797,992.

Van Wert County Auditor Nancy Dixon said there are 2,897 taxpayers enrolled in the Homestead Exemption, which saves each taxpayer between \$274.40 and \$398.44 per year on their taxes.

“The ‘grandfather clause’ is portable and can be used in any Ohio county a resident would move to,” Dixon stated. “It allows anyone who qualifies for the 2013 tax year to be accepted without income verification.”

Dixon emphasized it is very important that taxpayers who qualify under the grandfather clause are aware of this reduction. She said anybody with questions on qualifying for the exemption or who needs help with the paperwork can call or come into the auditor’s office. She said the paperwork can be mailed to the resident.

To qualify for the Homestead Exemption without means-testing (income verification), a property owner must have turned 65 years old in 2013 or earlier; or be totally and permanently disabled as of Jan. 1, 2013, as certified by a licensed physician or psychologist, or a state or federal agency; or be the surviving spouse of a person who was receiving the previous Homestead

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Exemption at the time of death and where the surviving spouse was at least 59 years old on the date of death.

To qualify for the Homestead Exemption with means-testing, an individual must have turned 65 years old in 2014 or later or be totally and permanently disabled as of Jan. 1 as certified by a licensed physician or psychologist, or a state or federal agency and have an Ohio Adjusted Gross Income (OAGI) of less than \$30,500.

The application requires individuals to show evidence of age, such as a driver's license, birth certificate, or Medicare Card. For more information, call these county auditor's offices: Allen 419-228-3700 ext. 8794, Putnam 419-523-6686 and Van Wert 419-238-0843.