

Assessor Called 'Vindictive'

Greenport

(Editor's Note: The following is an open letter to Riverhead Town Supervisor Joe Janoski.)

Enclosed please find copies of 12 1992 Small Claims Assessment Review (SCAR) decisions. These decisions are court orders directing that the 1992 assessment roll be corrected in accordance to the hearing officers' decisions, which are based on the Uniform Assessment Laws of New York State as they appear in Real Property Tax Law, section 305.

For the second year in a row, these names are before the Board of Assessment Review. Last year my company, Tax Reduction Services (TRS), applied for and received assessment reductions through the Suffolk County Supreme Court. These cases are being reviewed by the grievance board for the second year in a row because your assessor, Leroy Barnes, has bumped the assessments back up, in complete disregard to the SCAR decisions.

Mr. Barnes would like to imply that these court-ordered reductions are only good for one year, but that is only the case if the town decides to bump them back up. In order for a 1992 assessment to be increased on the 1993 roll, the assessor has to specifically go into the tax roll and raise it; they do not go back up by themselves.

Mr. Barnes seems to have instituted a policy of retaliatory assessment practices against those who had the audacity to bring petitions against the assessors' office and win deserved reductions. In addition, Mr. Barnes is trying to intimidate future grievors by harassing successful prior grievors. My clients want to know if you stand behind Mr. Barnes's outrageous actions.

As far as I know, the Town of Riverhead is not being reassessed. So why were these assessments raised? The assessor should not be going around spot-assessing properties on the basis of recent decisions against the town. When Mr. Barnes raises assessments out of vindictiveness, he is perpetuating dark notions of corrupt government. This behavior does not reflect fair government by elected officials; it clearly suggests that the Town of Riverhead has no respect for due process or its citizens.

As you know, my company specializes in identifying and reducing inequitable real-estate taxes. We have performed our services for thousands of clients in all the towns of Suffolk and

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Nassau counties. Riverhead is the only town in which we have had this problem.

Normally, when cases are resolved through the SCAR proceedings, the new assessed values are left alone by the towns. The assessor might not always agree with the decisions, but they abide by them out of respect for the citizens and the process. The Town of Riverhead owes them at least that much. To force my clients to go through the exact same process for the second time is an outrageous demonstration of government at its worst. Mr. Barnes's misguided actions speak very poorly for the entire Riverhead Town government.

There have been other actions by the assessors office which raise questions of fair and honest government. At this time I would like to request a meeting with you so that we may discuss the injustices that Mr. Barnes has imposed upon my clients and your constituents.

Most importantly, I strongly urge you to recommend that the Board of Assessment Review reduce my clients' assessments to the values determined in accordance with the 1992 SCAR decisions.

Sincerely,
Paul Henry, president
Tax Reduction Services

(Editor's Note: Whether or not to adjust an assessment reduced by a hearing officer or the Board of Assessment Review is determined on a case-by-case basis, according to Riverhead Assessor Leroy Barnes and Southold Assessor Scott Russell. Both assessors stressed that Small Claims Assessment Review decisions technically are valid for one year only, though reduced assessments are not automatically raised the next year. In the cases targeted by Mr. Henry, the Riverhead assessors' office applied this year's residential assessment ratio formula to the market values set by the hearing officer to arrive at new assessments higher than last year's but lower than the previous year's, assessors said.)