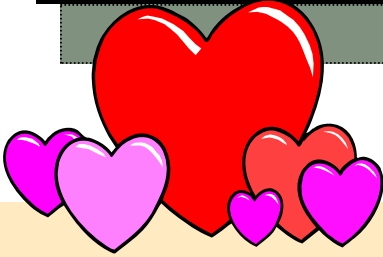


Assessors Newsletter

Issue 3

January-March Pg.1



- Quarterly Newsletter
- Articles about what's going on in your hometown
- Assessment and tax information
- Happenings in Niagara County

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All About STAR –FAQ

With changes happening with the STAR program, we will try to answer the most frequently asked questions.

What is STAR?

The New York State School Tax Relief Program (STAR) provides New York homeowners with partial exemptions from school property taxes. If you earn less than **\$500,000** and own and live in your home, you are probably eligible for the STAR exemption.

There are two parts to the STAR exemption:

Basic STAR is available for the owner-occupied, primary residence where the owner's total income is less than \$500,000. Basic STAR works by exempting the first \$30,000 of the full value of a home from school taxes.

Enhanced STAR provides an increased benefit for the primary residences of senior citizens. (age 65 and older) with qualifying incomes. Enhanced STAR exempts the first \$60,100 of the full value of their home from school taxes.

How do I apply for Basic STAR?

File an application with your local assessor. STAR applications are available from your assessor's office or on the internet at: www.orps.state.ny.us.

How do I apply for Enhanced STAR?

File an application with your assessor. For the 2011-2012 school year, senior citizens applying for the Enhanced STAR exemptions must demonstrate that the combined income of all the owners of the property-and of any owner's spouse who resides on the premises-was no greater than \$79,050 in 2009

Option 1: Traditional method

Prior to the deadline, provide your assessor with your STAR application and a copy of your income tax return's for the appropriate income tax year (see income definition that follows).

Option 2: STAR Income Verification Program

Provide the assessor with form RP-425-IVP (also available in large print), which includes your Social Security Number's) and authorizes the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance to verify your income eligibility each year. If you choose this option, you do not need to submit an application and copy of your tax return(s) to the assessor every year. In the initial year, prior to the deadline, you must submit the form to the assessor along with a traditional STAR application and the necessary income tax return's).

What is the deadline for submitting the STAR application?

STAR applications must either be received in the assessor's office or be postmarked by taxable status date. While taxable status date is March 1 in most municipalities, it varies for some cities and in some counties. When taxable status date falls on a Saturday, Sunday or public holiday, the deadline for filing exemption applications is extended until the next business day. To find the taxable status date (and other assessment calendar dates), assessor telephone numbers, and additional information for your municipality, visit www.orps.state.ny.us/munipro. When checking the deadline for filing STAR and other exemption applications, it is important that you check the taxable status date for the assessing unit in which you are filing the application. While the dates online are correct based on the best available information, we encourage you to confirm the taxable status date for your municipality with your assessor.

Continued on page 3

What is an appraisal and why do you need one?

Today, we hear more and more about appraisals as part of the real estate process. Tough markets, like the one in which we find ourselves today, bring the subject to the forefront more so than in times of booming sales and bidding wars.

Simply put, an appraisal is an informed estimate of the value of a property. It's the number lenders refer to when deciding whether, or not to approve loans. It could be said that appraisals are meant to help buyers and lenders avoid potentially bad investments.

Arriving at that final appraisal figure is no easy task -- to be accurate, an appraiser needs an educated, trained perspective and understanding of all of factors that have to be carefully weighed with respect to the state of the real estate market in that specific area. For example, major factors of the appraisal have more to do with the neighborhood than the home itself:

- The type of area: Is it part of a development? Or is it stand alone acreage?
- The recent sales prices of comparable homes located nearby
- The average sales time of this type of property in that area
- The proximity to desirable schools and public facilities

This information can be found by various sources -- from driving down the street and observing the surroundings, to gathering information at the local tax assessor's office and county courthouses, through MLSs (multiple listing services), by conducting interviews and more. It's a lot to consider, so you can see how having experience valuating properties within a given neighborhood is critical to arriving at an accurate appraisal. But what about the property itself? The appraiser will tour the home as a potential buyer would tour the home. Clean, updated well-maintained homes will appeal more to buyers -- and chances are, they'll appeal more to the appraiser as well. First impressions aside, for his analysis the appraiser will generally consider only permanent fixtures and real property -- that is, property that's permanently dug into, or set upon, land. So, a building is real property -- a couch is not. Added touches, like sconces or other added fixtures, are nice but do not count toward the appraiser's assessment. After taking stock of the real property, the appraiser estimates the square footage of the home. GLA, or gross living area, is calculated by measuring the exterior of the home. The appraiser will note the GLA and then will look to calculate actual living area space. So that means he deducts the measurements of non-living areas, such as garages or covered porches. (Although, surprisingly, finished basements are calculated separately from the above-ground GLA.) All said and done, depending on the size of the property, an appraisal should take anywhere from 15 minutes to three hours. Buyers (and lenders) can typically expect a report within a few business days. And who pays for the appraisal? Although the Lender arranges for the Appraisal, the buyer usually pays the bill. For an average home, that's usually around \$300 to \$500.

Property Tax- Myths and Misunderstandings

Myth #2

Taxes are high because of assessment

It's simple to distinguish between taxes and assessments. If you feel your taxes are too high, you should take that up with the town board, school board, or other governing authority that is determining tax levies and setting the tax rates. If you feel your assessment is too high, there are administrative and judicial processes where you can seek to have your assessment lowered.

Assessments should be based on market value, and if you feel your assessment is too high, your first step in confirming that is to determine your property's market value. The best way to do this is to look at the sale prices of similar properties in similar neighborhoods.

If you still feel that your assessment is too high, we recommend that you informally discuss your concerns with your assessor. More information on the grievance process is available from your assessor's office and online: www.orps.state.ny.us

Next Issue- **Myth #3 NY State collects too much money through property tax**



STAR-FAQ (continued from page 1)

What types of properties are eligible for STAR?

Both Basic and Enhanced STAR are available for owner-occupied residential properties, including: houses, condominiums, cooperative apartments, manufactured homes, farm houses. STAR is also available for mixed use properties, including apartment buildings, but only applies to the owner-occupied portion of such properties.

How will I know how much STAR is saving me in tax dollars?

As part of the STAR program, you will receive a school property tax bill or other notice that will clearly state the amount of the STAR exemption and your tax savings.

I currently receive the low-income senior citizen exemption. Can I receive the STAR benefits and still keep my other exemption?

Yes. To ensure the maximum STAR benefit, the program requires that, before applying STAR, assessors first apply all other applicable exemptions to the property's assessed value. In addition, low-income senior citizens who receive the Senior Citizens Exemption automatically qualify for Enhanced STAR. As a result, they need only to file and qualify for the Senior Citizen Exemption, and they will receive both that exemption and Enhanced STAR. The initial application form RP-467 (which is also available in large print) can be downloaded at: www.orps.state.ny.us (click on "Forms and Publications").

Does STAR apply to all taxes on my property?

No. The STAR exemption applies only to school district taxes. It does not apply to property taxes for other purposes, such as county, town or city.

For additional information and more frequently asked questions, go to website-www.orps.state.ny.us

City of Lockport-Revaluation

The City of Lockport has commenced a revaluation of all real property within the City for the 2011 Assessment Roll.

This "Assessment Equity" project will involve an inspection, from the public right-of-way of each property in the City and placing a fair and equitable market value (tax assessment) on each property. The purpose of this revaluation is to ensure that all properties in the City of Lockport are assessed on a consistent, fair and equitable basis.

The City has engaged the services of KLV Municipal, Inc. (KLV) of Buffalo, New York to assist in the valuation process. Project Manager Robert Koszarek and other KLV staff members began their efforts in November, 2009, collection demographic information on neighborhood within the City and verifying arms length sales that occurred during the past three years. Field work for the project will continue through April, 2011.

What this means for the property owner-Some of you may see your assessments go up or down depending on all of the information gathered and analyzed.

Niagara County Adopts Budget

Niagara County property taxes will increase an average of 1.9% with the Legislature's adoption of the 2011 county budget on 12/14/2010. The Legislature's five year run at cutting taxes came to an end because of New York state, Majority Leader Richard Updegrave, R-Lockport, said, " This is the most challenging budget we faced in several years. The most significant factor is, the New York state comptroller handed us an unprecedented increase in pension costs. They now exceed \$11 million for our workforce. To get the rate increase down from 5.4%, where it was in former County Manager Greg Lewis' proposed \$310 million budget, the Republican-led majority caucus pushed motions to dip into capital savings and cut nine more jobs for a total of 58, not all of them vacant.

Residential Sales-Niagara County

November 2010 thru January 31, 2011

Municipality	No. of Sales	Avg. Price	Median Price	Avg. DOM
Cambria	7	\$60,571	\$166,000	87
Hartland	6	\$126,500	\$117,500	49
Lewiston	24	\$144,756	\$141,000	100
Lockport, City	29	\$77,183	\$78,000	85
Lockport, Town	30	\$111,993	\$118,200	67
Newfane	11	\$86,159	\$76,000	82
Niagara, Town	9	\$89,364	\$90,000	49
Niagara Falls	40	\$58,428	\$59,250	70
N. Tonawanda	44	\$102,888	\$95,750	49
Pendleton	8	\$180,563	\$172,400	69
Porter	12	\$174,075	\$159,450	98
Royalton	7	\$83,900	\$87,300	57
Somerset	7	\$131,507	\$120,000	109
Wheatfield	23	\$178,242	\$164,000	78
Wilson	7	\$88,928	\$75,000	64
Niagara County Total	264	\$110,942	\$96,000	73

Glossary of Assessment Terms

Aesthetic Value-The enhancement of the worth of a property due to the pleasure derived from the beauty of improvements and /or surroundings, such as an exceptional value.

After-Tax Yield- The annual profit remaining after taxes have been paid, divided by the original equity investment

Age, Actual- The number of years since a structure was built. Also known as chronological age.

Age, Effective- The age of an improvement as indicated by its condition. A building that has been well maintained may have an effective age less than its actual age. The reverse may be true if a building has been neglected.

Agricultural District - An area established under New York State law to preserve and promote agriculture. The availability of preferential property treatment is characteristic of an agricultural district.

Agricultural Use Value- An estimate of the worth of agricultural property based on an income approach using productivity of the land as a measure of income.

Home Loans a Good Deal for Veterans

In a housing market convulsed by tight credit, flattened prices and weak home sales, there is a silver lining for one segment of the market: U.S. military veterans

seeking V.A. home loans.

Most honorably discharged veterans are eligible for **Department of Veteran Affairs** home loans. To be eligible, a veteran has to be honorably discharged and prove that he or she served 24 months of continuous active military duty. Can borrowers always get the full amount they want? Not necessarily. They have to qualify for the loan based on income and credit scores. The scores, however, are derived from activity over the last 12 months, instead of several years, the norm for civilians. The average credit score for a V.A. borrower last year was about 700; the average for all borrowers was 750, according to the **Federal Housing Finance Agency**.

There are other qualifications as well. For details, visit the Department of Veteran Affairs **website**. Lenders require a Certificate of Eligibility from the veteran affairs department. And interest rates? They're slightly better than conventional rates, depending on how much a borrower puts down. V.A. adjustable-rate mortgages are very desirable, says Rice. A 5/1 ARM (fixed rate for five years, then adjusted yearly) currently is "in the low 3 percents.". Conventional 30-year fixed-rate mortgages are about 4.25%, with 20% down. V.A. fixed-rate loans are the same, but with zero down.

VACANT LAND SALES

Municipality	Address	Acres	Date	Price
Lewiston	Upper Mt Rd	2.7	11/19	\$14,000
Lewiston	No. Fifth	0.20	12/8/	\$39,000
Pendleton	1651 Creek	21.20	11/3	\$29,000
Pendleton	2933 Main	4.25	11/18	\$22,000
Cambria	3870 N. Ridge	32.90	11/12	\$95,000
Cambria	Baer Rd	46.90	12/2	\$80,000
Hartland	Seaman Rd	23.30	12/3	\$23,000

Commercial Sales November 2010 thru January 2011

Municipality	Address	Property	Sale Date	Sale Price
Niagara Falls	1736 Lafayette	Apt/68 units	12/2010	\$950,000
Niagara Falls	723 3rd St	Apt/18 units	12/2010	\$385,000
Niagara Falls	2908 Pine Ave	One story retail	12/2010	\$20,000
Niagara Falls	8721 Niagara Falls Blvd	Gas Station	11/2010	\$210,000
City of Lockport	211 Lock	Apt/6 units	11/2010	\$75,000
City of Lockport	122 Cottage	Apt/4 units	11/2010	\$50,000
Town of Lockport	6559 Lincoln	Apt/12 units	11/2010	\$290,000
North Tonawanda	1155 Nash	Apt/4 units	12/2010	\$170,000
North Tonawanda	317 Schenk	Apt/5 units	11/2010	\$64,000
North Tonawanda	82 Webster	Row	11/2010	\$70,000
Village Lewiston	451 Center	Row	11/2010	\$185,000
Pendleton	6061 Corwin	One story retail	12/2010	\$28,750
Royalton	9720 Rochester	Body shop	11/2010	\$130,000

Buffalo Niagara housing market keeps slumping

This Was Printed From Business First

Business First

Home sales plunged for a second straight month in the Buffalo Niagara region, declining 24 percent compared to September of last year.

In all, 717 single-family homes were sold in September, the lowest count for the month in this decade, according to the [Buffalo Niagara Association of Realtors](#). Last year, there were 944 transactions completed in that same month.

Through the first three quarters of the year, area home sales are running 13 percent below 2009 — 6,443 this year compared to 7,384 in 2009.

The September fall was not as bad as August, when home sales dropped 43 percent.

The good news in the BNAR report is that both median and average prices climbed in the period. Median prices improved 8 percent to \$121,000 from \$112,500 year-over-year. Average prices rose 11 percent to \$138,499 from \$125,211.

Total dollar volume was off 11 percent to \$99.3 million from \$112.06 million in 2009. Active and new listings also rose by 14 percent and 3 percent, respectively. BNAR said there were 6,108 active properties for sale, up from 5,367, and 1,578 new listings, up from 1,538 last year.

Assessors Contact Information

Municipality	Name	Phone No.
Lockport-City	Joseph Macaluso	439-6614
North Tonawanda	Flora Carozzolo	695-8597
Niagara Falls	Dominic Penale	286-4388
Cambria	Janelle Kroening	433-8161
Hartland	Michael Hartman	735-7220
Lewiston	Gene Virtuoso	754-8213
Lockport-Town	John Shoemaker	439-9526
Newfane	Patricia Truax	778-8827
Niagara-Town	Darlene Sullivan	297-2150-129
Pendleton	Karen Manning	625-8833-6
Porter	Barbara Oaks	745-3730
Royalton	Michael Hartman	772-7826
Somerset	Robert Glidden	795-3243
Wheatfield	Brigette Grawe	694-9102
Wilson	Dominic Penale	751-6705-15

Newsletter Courtesy of Brisbane Consulting Group

Brisbane Consulting Group, LLC was formed in 1996 and specializes in business consulting, business valuations, forensic accounting, and litigation support. We are experienced in business valuation procedures, methodologies, standards, reporting, and expert witness testimony. Brisbane Consulting Group is the largest and most accredited business valuation firm in Buffalo, N.Y. and is affiliated with all major business valuation organizations and societies including the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, the American Society of Appraisers and the National Association of Certified Valuation Analyst.

Real Estate Division-We are a full service real estate appraisal and consulting company. Our mission is to provide our clients with worthwhile information and services. We have the resources to collect analyze and present various types of information for our clients' specific needs.

Please contact us at agirasole@briscon.com or call

(716) 856-3428 with questions or a free proposal.

*403 Main Street, Suite 403
Buffalo, New York*

Assessor's Corner

Michael Hartman, assessor for the Town of Royalton cannot praise Donna Aiken, assessor's clerk, enough, for her hard work and dedication. Donna began her career working for McIntosh & McIntosh Land Surveyors back in 1969 printing deeds off microfilm, then learning to read and plot them and eventually taking the plotted deeds and plotting them onto the tax maps. She worked there in some capacity for some years, while raising her family. In 1979, she was hired by the Niagara County Real Property Tax Services, where she stayed until 1983. Donna was then hired by the Town of Royalton and Tom Arlington as a part time clerk and where she has been for 27 years. Donna says, "The journey has been an interesting and fulfilling one, having learned more aspects of the assessor's duties and working with the public when needed which for the most part I enjoy." Donna looks forward to a few more years working with Mike Hartman before she retires.

"It is a wonderful thing having a clerk of her caliber" said Mike Hartman

Happenings around the Area

Welcome to the Historic Riviera Theatre

67 Webster Street, North Tonawanda

Presents in :

"Coal Miner's Daughter"-Mar. 2 @7:30 FREE

Loretta Lynn in Concert-Mar.3 @7:30pm-tickets \$55-\$65

Call 692-2113 for times and ticket prices or the website-

www.rivieratheatre.org

Aquarium of Niagara

701 Whirlpool St, Niagara Falls, NY

Each Saturday in Feb. the Aquarium offers performances by WNY's most exciting storytellers, with 2 shows each Saturday.

Contact the Aquarium for times and prices at 716-285-3575

Just Say No

Lockport Family YMCA

19 East Avenue, Lockport

March 5, 2011

(716)434-8887

Co-sponsored by Lockport Family YMCA & Barge Canal Optimist Club

Fun Night for Grades 3, 4 & 5

Swim, Gym, Group Activity

Refreshments and Guest Speaker

Price: \$1.00 per child

Registration starts at 6:30pm

Contact: Laurie Ferris @ 716-434-8887