

# BROOKS COUNTY RECORD

1st Quarter 2015

Issue 3



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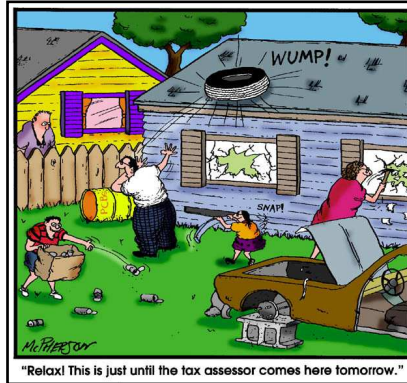
## Be Involved

### Brooks County

- ◆ Youth Baseball/Softball leagues will begin in March. Signups in February Pg 4 for more details.
- ◆ Commission Meetings are 5p.m. on the first Monday of every month (excluding holidays)
- ◆ [www.brookscountytax.com](http://www.brookscountytax.com) Tax Commissioner's Site now online!

## Tax Assessor's Office: Always Working!

Pam Jones—Tax Assessor's Office



The office hours are 8:00 A.M. through 5:00 P.M., Monday through Friday.

January 1 thru April 1 is an important time in the board of tax assessors' office. This three month period is the opportunity for all property owners to return their property for taxation at its fair market value. All ad valorem tax bills are based on the value of the property as of a specific date. In Georgia that date of valuation is January 1. Although the property tax bill is not due until the Fall, it represents the ownership and value of the property as of January 1. The tax bill is the product of work performed throughout the year by numerous offices and officials, rates are advertised, owners are notified, values are finalized and everything is submitted to the state months before the bills are printed. If you wait until you receive your tax bill to try to lower it, you may have waited until it is too late.

January 1 thru April 1 is the best time to meaningfully affect the amount of your upcoming tax bill. The best way to do this is to inspect and verify the tax records concerning your property and make sure you are receiving all exemptions you may qualify for. The

assessors' office makes every effort to value properties as uniformly and accurately as possible but since they are responsible for valuing all property in the county and you are primarily concerned with, and most familiar with, your property, it is your right and responsibility to make sure that the information concerning your property is accurate.

January 1 thru April 1 is not just for real property such as land and buildings, but also for personal property and Freeport exemption. Personal property includes all business inventory, machinery, furniture and fixtures, boats and airplanes. Personal property return forms are mailed to new and existing businesses and owners of boats and airplanes. Personal property, particularly business inventory and equipment is rarely the same from year to year. The timely and accurate return of personal property may save you from erroneous or incorrect tax bills later in the year, and ensure that your property is assessed fairly. Some manufacturing businesses may be eligible for Freeport exemption which must be applied for every year during the return period. If you should have received any of these forms and did not, they are available in the board of tax assessors' office or online at the Georgia Department of Revenue website.

January 1 and April 1 are important dates for homestead exemption. You may apply for homestead in the board of tax assessors' office year round. However, in order to qualify for any tax year, you must apply on or before April 1, own the property on January 1, and it must be your primary residence as of that date. (Continued on Page 2)

## Tax Assessor's Office: Still Working! (from Page 1)

**Pam Jones—Chief Appraiser (229) 263-7920**

In addition to the standard exemption, there are larger exemptions offered by the state and available in Brooks County. Typically the larger exemptions are based on age and income or other factors such as being a 100% service connected disabled veteran or the surviving spouse of a fire fighter or police officer killed in the line of duty. All of the exemptions may be found in the board of tax assessors' office or online at the Georgia Department of Revenue website. It is important to remember that in order to receive any exemption you must apply for it. Once you have applied for and been granted homestead exemption you will continue to receive it until you no longer meet the qualifications.

January 1 thru April 1 is the time the state allows property owners to apply for agricultural covenants. These statewide covenants are voluntary and last for a specific period of time, either 10 or 15 years based on the covenant. They may be renewed at the end of the time period but only by completing a new application, failure to do so within the allowed time period will result in loss of covenant and a corresponding increase in taxes. The tax benefit of these covenants can be substantial but they are not without risk. In order to receive the tax benefit the owner must agree to abide by the restrictions of the covenant or pay penalties, in most cases penalties are twice the savings received during the life of the covenant. Similarly, if you violate the covenant in any way, you will be notified in writing and given time to correct the potential breach, if you do not do so within the time provided, usually by April 1, you will be in breach of covenant and subject to penalties. If you bought property under a covenant and fail to continue it prior to April 1 you may be in breach of covenant and subject to penalties. Information about the various covenants, their ownership, use and acreage requirements, restrictions, benefits and risks may be found in the board of tax assessors' office or online at the Georgia Department of Revenue website. <http://dor.georgia.gov/>

Our office strives to be open and accessible to everyone, come by any time during business hours to discuss your property and any options which may be available to you. Many of our records as well as other property tax information can be found, free of charge, on our website at [www.qpublic.net/ga/brooks](http://www.qpublic.net/ga/brooks).

The Tax Assessor's Office is located in the Brooks County Board of Commissioner's Office at 610 South Highland Road, Quitman, GA 31643 and open Monday—Friday 8 am to 5pm.

The Tax Assessor's Office will also be visiting the Rosenwald School in Barney, Georgia on March 3rd to discuss the role that the Assessor's Office plays in local governments and the different options available to tax payers concerning their property and values. For more information, contact the Tax Assessor's Office at 263-7920.

## Mobile Home Bills Due May 1st, Website Online Now

**Jerri Dukes—Tax Commissioner—(229) 263-4586**

Brooks County Property Owners that receive an annual Pre-Bill Mobile Home property tax bill should expect that notice to arrive in February. Mobile Home bills are due each year by May 1st and are to be paid in the Tax Commissioner's Office. Mobile homes are also subject to the Brooks County Fire Protection Fee, and a charge of \$65 dollars per pre-bill mobile home is attached to each bill.

Brooks County is also pleased to announce that the Tax Office's new webpage, <http://www.brookscountytax.com> is now online and available. Brooks County customers can now check the status of their account online, as the site is updated every 20 minutes, and make payments towards their bills using a credit card. Customers wishing to make payments online for car tags will continue to use the Department of Revenue site.

## Probate Proceedings, Legal Matters With or Without Wills

**Judge Beth Hurst—Probate Judge (229) 263-5567**

The Brooks County Probate Office, located in the Brooks County Courthouse, is available for any citizens wishing to obtain a gun permit, marriage license or handle probate issues that arise. There are a number of different proceedings which may be filed in the Probate Court following the death of a Georgia Resident or a non-resident owning property in the State of Georgia. Proceedings are filed in the Probate Court of the county of the deceased's residence in Georgia or in the county where property of a non-resident is located.

It is suggested that you discuss the matters of concern with an attorney who practices probate or estate law. The attorney can assist you in determining which proceeding is the most appropriate for your particular situation. Very often, there are other matters related to probate proceedings (e.g., tax returns, preparation of deeds, title transfers, benefit claims, creditor notices, debtor demands, etc.) which may also make it appropriate or necessary to seek the services of an attorney.

If you proceed without an attorney, i.e., *pro se* (a Latin phrase meaning "for one's self"), it will be your responsibility to determine or select the proceeding appropriate to your situation. The staff of the Probate Court may not make the determination or selection for you, since to do so may constitute the unauthorized practice of law, a misdemeanor crime under Georgia law. Neither the Court nor the County can accept responsibility for incorrect decisions made by the staff, and they have been directed to refrain from giving that kind of advice.

It is also your responsibility to properly complete all forms, which must either be typed or legibly printed, and to assure the sufficiency and accuracy of all required information. The staff are not permitted to perform clerical tasks for the public and cannot accept responsibility for determining the legal sufficiency of the information required for any proceeding or form. The staff will be able to answer any basic questions about the standard forms and about any deadlines for the filing of proceedings. They will also be able to schedule uncontested hearings and tell you how other matters are scheduled by the Court.

The Probate Judge is required by law to remain impartial to all parties. The Judge must treat every case as though it may become contested. Therefore, the Judge also may not advise you on which proceeding is the most appropriate to your case. The Judge is prohibited from discussing the facts or evidence in any contested case with one party unless all parties are present or represented. You should not ask to discuss your case privately with the Judge, and you should understand if the Judge stops any discussion which appears to require the presence of others.

Official matters regarding matters where a will is present can be handled several ways. The two important choices are Solemn Form Probate, which requires notice to all heirs-at-law and becomes binding upon all parties immediately upon appointment of the Executor. And Common Form Probate, this procedure may be done without notice to heirs but does not become binding for four years after the appointment of the Executor. In addition, an appointed Executor may not be able to serve or wish not to serve. In this case, a willing person who does not wish to serve must sign a declination.

If no will is present, a Permanent Administration may be established. This process requires notice to all heirs. A surviving spouse or sole heir is entitled to serve as Administrator; otherwise, the Administrator must be selected by a majority of the heirs. Administrators must post bond and file inventories and returns, unless ALL heirs-at-law consent to a waiver of those requirements. If ALL heirs consent, the Administrator may be given additional powers and authority. Natural guardians of minor heirs and legal guardians of incapacitated adult heirs may acknowledge service, consent to selection and consent to waive requirements, unless the guardian is the petitioner. Temporary Administration differs from a permanent because notice to all heirs-at-law is not required, but a majority of the heirs-at-law must select the Temporary Administrator, unless the petitioner is the surviving spouse or sole heir-at-law. Powers are limited to collecting and preserving the assets of the deceased. More information concerning probate matters can be obtain by contacting the Probate Office at the Brooks County Courthouse. They have informational free pamphlets in the office for probate proceedings as mentioned above, information regarding Marriage Licenses, and Adult Guardianships.

## Brooks County Board of Commissioners

610 South Highland Road  
P.O. Box 272  
Quitman, GA 31643

Phone: 229-263-5561  
Fax: 229-263-9345

*Myra Exum—Chairperson, District 4*  
*Joe Wingate—Vice Chairman, District 1*  
*S.L. Jones—District 2*  
*Willie Cody—District 3*  
*James Maxwell—District 5*

*Justin DeVane—Administrator*  
*Patricia Williams—Clerk*

[HTTP://WWW.BROOKSCOUNTYGA.US](http://www.brookscountyga.us)  
[HTTP://WWW.BROOKSCOUNTYRECORD.COM](http://www.brookscountyrecord.com)  
[HTTP://WWW.BROOKSCOUNTYTAX.COM](http://www.brookscountytax.com)  
[HTTP://WWW.BROOKSSHERIFF.COM](http://www.brookssheriff.com)



*Tax Commissioner—Jerrri Dukes (229) 263-4586*  
*Sheriff—Mike Dewey (229) 263-7558*  
*Clerk of Courts—Ginger Forgione (229) 263-4747*  
*Magistrate Court—Joyce Miskiel (229) 263-9989*  
*Probate Court—Beth Hurst (229) 263-5567*  
*Road Superintendent—Glenn Walker (229) 263-8817*  
*Elections Superintendent—Ken Collins (229) 263-9939*  
*Tax Assessor—Pam Jones (229) 263-7920*  
*911/EMA Director—Mike Smith (229) 263-4262*  
*Fire Department—Tom Fields (229) 263-1047*  
*Building & Zoning—Billy Ingram (229) 263-5184*  
*Extension Office—Stephanie Hollifield (229) 263-4103*  
*Victim Witness—Peggy Wilson (229) 263-9866*

## Local Appointment to State Commission on Family Violence

**Peggy Wilson—Victim Advocate (229) 263-9866**

Ms. Peggy Wilson has been appointed by the Governor to the State Commission on Family Violence. Peggy has been the director and legal advocate for the Brooks County Victim Assistance Program for the past 21 years. She is a member and former board member of the Brooks County Family Connections. She was recipient of the 1996 National Association of Counties Achievement award and was named the 1997 Georgians for Victim Justice Advocate of the Year. Wilson earned a bachelor's degree in Public Administration from LaSalle University. She and her husband, Robert, have two children and three grandchildren.

## 2015 Youth Baseball/Softball Program

**Andrew Hodom—Area Director— (229) 300-8508**



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS  
OF VALDOSTA**

The Brooks County Recreation Department, operated by the Boys and Girls Club, is pleased to announce the 2015 Youth Baseball/Softball Leagues. Signups will begin February 2nd and run through the 20th. Evaluations and drafts will be held February 21st and the season will begin March 14th, ending May 2nd.

In addition to youth sports leagues, the Club is also hosting several weekend tournaments throughout the year. A kickball tournament will be held May 16th, an adult slow-pitch softball tournament will be June 6th, Dodgeball on August 15th, and Soccer season beginning in November.

Parties interested in signups and sponsorships can contact Andrew Hodom for more information. Sponsorship packages are available starting at \$150 up to \$400 for the entire year. Keep up to date at <http://www.facebook.com/brookscorec>