

## Time-Saving Suggestion Nets Employee Cash Award

Information provided by Denny Rhodes, Suggestion Award Board; photo by Martin Valent of the West Virginia Legislature.



*DMV employee Opal Keebaugh receives a check for her cost-saving suggestion from Governor Joe Manchin.*

Unpaid parking tickets aren't just a sore spot for the offender – they're a pain for workers at the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV), too!

Each ticket used the same information entered multiple times, costing valuable employee time. DMV employee Opal Keebaugh recognized the amount of labor that could be saved and recommended a computer programming modification to reduce the amount of entries needed.

Sound like a minor thing to you? Think again! Ms. Keebaugh's idea was implemented by the DMV in 2005, and the result eliminated 13 keystrokes per entry. The time needed to enter a batch of unpaid tickets dropped by a whopping 50%!

In the first year of implementation, the DMV realized a savings of just under \$4,450. That savings paid off not only to the agency, but to Ms. Keebaugh also. On November 17, 2008, the Employee Suggestion Award Board (Board) voted to award her the maximum allowable award for her suggestion: \$889.44.

The Employee Suggestion Award Board makes cash or honorary awards to State employees who contribute suggestions and ideas that, when implemented, result in significant savings and/or improvements in State government operations. The Board was created under West Virginia Code § 5A-1A-et. seq. within the Department of Administration.

Do you have a cost-saving idea you think is too small to make much difference? Why not test the waters and see if your small idea becomes a stepping stone to a nice payoff! Think it through, put as much as you can on paper, and contact your agency's Employee Suggestion Coordinator for help in submitting your idea (ask your supervisor if you're not sure who serves in that capacity). You can also contact the Board directly by calling 347-4890 for questions or information.

## CONGRATULATIONS, OPAL!

### A New West Virginia

A New West Virginia was the inaugural theme as, on a cold and snowy January 19, 2009, with First Lady Gayle Manchin at his side, Governor Joe Manchin III was sworn in for his second term as Governor of West Virginia. The ceremony took place at 1:00 P.M. on the North Capitol Steps, with West Virginia Supreme Court Chief Justice Brent Benjamin administering the oath of office.

To watch, listen to, or read the Governor's inaugural address: [www.wv.gov/org/sec.aspx?id=32&articleid=1721](http://www.wv.gov/org/sec.aspx?id=32&articleid=1721)




Take a few minutes to review the State's Emergency Situations/Inclement Weather Policy at:  
[www.state.wv.us/admin/personnel/emprel/policies/Emerg2.pdf](http://www.state.wv.us/admin/personnel/emprel/policies/Emerg2.pdf)

## Dept. of Revenue Recommends E-Filing Your Tax Returns

Contributed by Kimberly Osborne of the Department of Revenue.

Did you know 60% of West Virginia Personal Income Tax returns are e-filed? It's the most accurate way to file – error rates are considerably less than paper which means faster processing and a faster refund in your hand.

Easily file your 2008 West Virginia personal income tax return electronically with the West Virginia State Tax Department. For some taxpayers, e-filing is FREE! Taxpayers who e-file receive fast, accurate, and secure service. By filing electronically, taxpayers receive their refunds faster than those taxpayers who are due a refund and file paper returns.

Refunds can be directly deposited into your bank account in as little as 10 working days for correct e-filed returns. Correct paper filed returns can take up to 7 weeks before a taxpayer receives a refund check.

E-filing can improve accuracy for those taxpayers with balances due to the State of West Virginia. In addition, while no payment is due until April 15, 2009, e-filing allows taxpayers to pay their debt by check, direct debit, or credit card. By choosing the free direct debit for balance due returns, taxpayers can select any withdrawal date up to the due date. That means the taxpayer chooses exactly when the balance due is paid to the State, as long as the date is no later than April 15, 2009.

To avoid processing delays, e-filers who claim Tax Credit Schedules such as Schedule E, Non Family Adoption, Neighborhood Investment Program Credit, etc., should fax the completed Schedules to the e-file office at (304) 558-1150 immediately following the return transmission.

In order to avoid discrepancies, taxpayers that e-file should verify the amount of estimated payments or carry forward credits claimed on their returns prior to transmission of the return. Taxpayers may do so by calling the Taxpayer Services Division at (304) 558-3333 or 1-800-982-8297.

West Virginia has continued an agreement with Free File Alliance member companies. This alliance enables qualified West Virginia taxpayers' free online filing services. Each Free File Alliance member sets taxpayer eligibility requirements for its program. Learn if you qualify for free e-filing by visiting the Free Income Tax e-file section on the West Virginia State Tax Department website.

You can e-file today! Learn more about e-filing and other personal income tax tips at [www.wvtax.gov](http://www.wvtax.gov).

## 529 Investors to Find More Account Flexibility

State Treasurer John Perdue has announced that SMART529 enrollees are now able to change their investment strategies twice a year, thanks to a new ruling from the U.S. Treasury and the Internal Revenue Service.

A SMART529 account is a method to save money for college and is officially sanctioned by the West Virginia College Savings and Prepaid Tuition Fund.

Current rules allow for only one allocation change each year per account. The new ruling was forthcoming for two reasons: to give investors more flexibility and as a result of current market conditions.

As president of the West Virginia Board, Treasurer Perdue says his office is happy with the federal ruling. "Those in the Treasurer's Office who market and oversee our plan, along with officials of other plans, have been lobbying the IRS on this issue. With the financial markets the way they are, parents should have additional opportunities to adjust on the fly."

The new ruling is in effect for Calendar Year 2009. For more information on the new ruling, visit [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov); for more on the SMART529 program, go to [www.smart529.com](http://www.smart529.com), or you can call 1-877-767-8529 or your local bank's investment firm.



*Give your child or grandchild the gift of a future. Check out a SMART529 plan at [www.smart529.com](http://www.smart529.com).*

## Collection Criteria, Options Eased by IRS

The Internal Revenue Services (IRS), long-feared as being relentless in tax collections, is showing its softer side.

It's estimated that nationwide, there are approximately 10 million people out of work. To help alleviate the worry for the financially stressed, the IRS is offering some new plans and flexibility options. The taxpayer must merely provide a good-faith effort to pay what's owed.

Included in the easements are:

- ✦ Granting IRS employees greater authority to suspend collection actions where the taxpayer simply cannot pay, and providing flexibility when a payment is missed. Previously, if a payment

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## Out with the Old, In with the New ... Way of Dialing the Phone

*Edited from information provided by the Office of Technology.*

It's a brand new year, and there's a brand new way to dial local telephone calls in West Virginia.

West Virginia has gone from being a state with one area code to having two area codes. Rather than divide the State into portions that will use the new area code and portions that will use the old one, the decision was made to assign the new area code (681) to new phone service. Based on that, you will be required to dial the area code along with the regular seven-digit number for all local calls (and long distance as you always have) except for X11 numbers like 911, 411, etc. The change takes place beginning February 28, 2009 and will apply to all of phones: home, cell, and business.

### REGARDING YOUR BUSINESS TELEPHONES:

This change also means that individuals and businesses will have to reprogram not just telephones and related features such as speed dialing, call forwarding, and voice mail, but also fax machines, Internet dial-up numbers, life-safety systems, and security systems. Any documents containing phone numbers may need to be altered, including personal and business checks, business cards, stationery, print media, and webpages.

You don't have to wait until February 28 to start the new practice. In fact, the Office of Technology (OT) and many of the phone companies are recommending you begin now and report any potential problems right away. OT has been working proactively to make the transition as easy as possible, but testing on your part will identify areas that still need to be

adjusted. You may report problems to the Office of Technology Service Desk at 1-304-558-9966, 1-877-558-9966 or [servicedesk@wv.gov](mailto:servicedesk@wv.gov).

Everyone should begin using 10-digit dialing now. Also, please test your speed dials, fax machines, call forwarding, voicemail, and other numbers associated with your work environment. Review your forms, letterhead, print media, and webpages and update accordingly.

If any 10-digit calls fail, try using the 11-digit format (1-304-xxx-xxxx). If this works, make note that you will need to dial a '1' first to call this number in the future. If neither method works, report it to the OT Service Desk so the issue can be resolved before the February 28 date.

The following links will provide additional information. Please feel free to contact the OT Service Desk with any concerns or questions.

**NOTE: Always follow your agency protocol for contacting OT!**

[www.psc.state.wv.us/  
10\\_DigitDialing/default.htm](http://www.psc.state.wv.us/10_DigitDialing/default.htm)

[www.nanpa.com/pdf/PL\\_375.pdf](http://www.nanpa.com/pdf/PL_375.pdf)

[www.nanpa.com/pdf/PL\\_375.pdf](http://www.nanpa.com/pdf/PL_375.pdf)

Washington ★ Lincoln ★ Obama

## It Happened at the Inauguration

*On February 16, we'll celebrate and honor the birthdays of our first President, George Washington, and our 16th President, Abraham Lincoln (the 200th anniversary for him). With 2009 being the inaugural year for our newest president, Barack Obama, we thought you'd find the following inaugural facts regarding Washington, Lincoln, and Obama interesting:*

- ★ The inauguration of George Washington was delayed from its March 4, 1789 date until April 6 of that year. The reason? Bad weather! The harsh, bitter cold winter made travel to New York difficult. It wasn't until April 6 that enough congressmen arrived to count the votes and declare Washington the winner.
- ★ Washington's inauguration speech was 135 words – the shortest of any to-date.
- ★ The inauguration of Abraham Lincoln occurred on March 4, 1861. He took office just days after seven southern states seceded from the union.
- ★ Lincoln was the first to include African-Americans in his inaugural parade.
- ★ At his inauguration, Barack Obama, took his oath of office using Abraham Lincoln's Bible and was served Lincoln's menu at his inauguration luncheon.
- ★ Obama was sworn in a second time on his second day as president because, following Chief Justice John Roberts' lead, he improperly recited the oath.

### Forestry Accepting Arbor Day Poster Contest Entries

The Division of Forestry is now accepting entries for the 2009 WV Arbor Day Poster Contest. The theme is *Trees are Terrific ... in Cities and Towns!* The contest is open to all West Virginia 5th Grade students. Deadline is March 2. For details and

prize information visit Forestry's website:

[www.wforestry.com/  
arbor.cfm](http://www.wforestry.com/arbor.cfm)



Above graphic copyrighted to Bobbie Peachey  
<http://webclipart.about.com>

## IRS – Continued from Page 2

was missed or late, the entire amount was due. Taxpayers can now skip a payment or get a reduced payment without automatically affecting their back tax installment agreement. Again, a good-faith effort is needed.

- ❖ Expanding its free e-filing program to include nearly all taxpayers, regardless of income. (NOTE: See related article on Page 2.)
- ❖ Setting up a special unit to work with homeowners caught up in the housing market slump. In cases where a home's value has prevented it from being sold, the IRS will work with the homeowner to reach an *offer in compromise*, which will allow the taxpayer to settle a tax debt for less than what's actually due. Instead of seizing the home, the IRS can offer alternatives and options to avoid default.
- ❖ Loosening requirements for levy releases, which affects those whose pay/bank accounts are garnished for delinquent taxes.

IRS Commissioner Doug Shulman has instructed his staff to be more sensitive to taxpayers, especially when they have been paying on time or paying according to the terms of agreements previously reached.

Referring to taxpayers who are in difficult situations, Shulman said, "If they pick up the phone or write to us, our people have been instructed to work with taxpayers through these tough economic times."

He points out that although tax agents are given more leeway to work with taxpayers, it doesn't apply to those who fail to file and/or ignore contact from the IRS. "The most important thing for people to do is to get on the phone or walk into an IRS office," advised Shulman. You can contact the IRS toll-free at 1-800-829-1040.

If you're going through a financial hardship right now, you might want to check out the IRS' *What If's* page ([www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=201853,00.html](http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=201853,00.html)). That page provides information on how different circumstances (like unemployment, IRA withdrawals, or home equity woes) affect your tax situation.

Don't panic about your taxes. Take a proactive approach by contacting the IRS and if possible, consulting a competent financial advisor. Don't forget to work things out with the State Tax Department as well. If you do these things, and put forth a good-faith effort, you should be able to weather the storm and emerge to a brighter day.

## News From the Medical Front

### Eye Health and Macular Degeneration

Almost everyone has seen grids published in magazines. They look like the outline of a checkerboard. If you first close one eye, then the other to look at it, you might have discovered that with one or both eyes, the lines were a little wavy in the center of the grid.

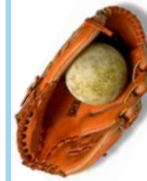
The bad news is that you may have a very early case of macular degeneration or AMD. The good news is that eye-health supplements could make those lines look straight again. Doctors at Tufts University say a combination of vitamins C and E, zinc, copper, lutein, zeaxanthin, and astaxanthin increase central-retinal function in patients with early AMD. Most of these are included in a multivitamin; the last three generally are not.

As always, consult your medical provider for your right course of action.

## Pencil In...



The Co-ed State Employees Softball League is preparing for its 2009 season. Form a team within your agency, or join a team. If you want to play, they'll find you a spot. The primary focus is fun, so don't worry if you're out of shape and haven't played in 20 years. Contact Jay Pemberton: 304-340-0309 or [jpemberton@psc.state.wv.us](mailto:jpemberton@psc.state.wv.us).



Kanawha County residents can check the status of their personal property and real estate taxes online at <http://129.71.205.110:8383/>



The most recent bi-annual review of the State's mileage reimbursement has resulted in a rate of 44.5¢ per mile for employees' privately owned vehicles, effective January 20, 2009.



*We are all born the same. What you make of yourself is up to you.*



Matthew J. Brierley

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