

## Property owners questioning assessments

By LINDA GALLAGHER

BELLAIRE-As if a bad economy, rising inflation, and a long, cold winter isn't enough for area property owners to deal with, many got more bad news in the mail recently-their property assessments.

Why? "Because, for the first time for many of these folks, their SEV (state equalized values) or assessed value, was lower than their taxable value," said Antrim County Equalization Department Director Robert Englebrecht.

The change comes as a direct result of Proposal A, passed by

the state's voters in 1994, and a currently declining real estate market, Englebrecht said. "Prior to 1994, both the SEV and taxable value were equal, which reportedly had a lot of people being taxed out of the nice homes they'd saved all their lives to build," he said. "Proposal A put a cap on taxable values, keeping property taxes more in line-Proposal A was actually intended to save people money on their taxes."

But the think tanks behind the proposal had not considered the possibility of a declining real estate market, which is occurring now all over the country, Engle-

brecht said. "That's how we've come up with the situation many property owners are facing now-because of the disparity between the assessed value and the taxable value of a property."

Under Proposal A, taxable value is set according to a Consumer Price Increase given by the state, which cannot exceed 5% in any given year. That CPI, Englebrecht noted, is set at 2.3% for 2008-but last year it was 3.7%.

"Only when the taxable value and assessed value is equal will a property owner see his taxable

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value decrease in a declining market," he said.

Most property owners should not be overly alarmed that their taxes will soar due to the change, he said. "Although very few people are going to see decreases in their actual tax bills, and most will see a bit of an increase, depending on your millage, it is possible that you will either have the same amount of taxes or even less than last year."

Based on an Antrim County average assessed value of \$44,800, an average equalization factor of 1.00000 percent, and a homestead millage of 23.5, the average Antrim County resident will see an increase of about \$24 in their 2008 property tax bills,

he said. "A non-resident's property tax bills, with the higher millage rate, will be quite a bit more," he said.

Englebrecht encouraged property owners with questions to either contact their township assessor through their township office, or attend one of several Board of Review hearings planned by all Antrim County Townships in the next few weeks. "The dates and times of each Board of Review are listed at the bottom of each property tax assessment," he said. "Questions and appeals may also be sent through the mail if sent prior to a certain date on each tax assessment."

"Everyone should understand what they're paying for," he said. "Their township tax assessor can help them."