

Contact: Chip Guy
Chief of Public Information
Sussex County Administration
(302) 854-5000
pio@sussexcountype.gov

Sussex County Council
Administrative Offices
2 The Circle
PO Box 589
Georgetown, DE 19947

Sussex County
Government

News Release

Sussex County collects almost \$1.2 million in recent amnesty programs

Georgetown, Del., March 16, 2010: The slate is officially clean for property owners and others who took advantage of Sussex County's recent tax and sewer amnesty programs.

County officials on Tuesday, March 16, 2010, announced results of the first-ever amnesty initiatives, which collected nearly \$800,000 in delinquent taxes for the County and independent school districts, and almost \$400,000 in back sewer and water fees. Approximately 4,000 delinquent account holders took advantage of the property tax and sewer and water amnesty programs.

"The amnesty programs were a success," County Administrator David Baker said. "They did exactly what we hoped they would do: they improved the County's collection, and, at the same time, provided help to delinquent taxpayers to reduce their debts."

The amnesty programs began early this year, aimed at collecting more than \$10 million in delinquent taxes and back sewer and water fees from approximately 23,000 individuals. Those who paid off their debts during the 30-day amnesty periods – one for sewer and water customers, another for property taxes – were eligible for a 50 percent reduction in penalties.

For delinquent taxpayers, the County's 18 percent annual penalty was reduced to 9 percent. The 12 percent annual penalty for delinquent sewer customers was halved to 6 percent.

For Immediate Release

more

The County offered the amnesty periods as a last-chance incentive before turning to stiffer measures, including the use of a new collections manager, warning letters, liens on property and eventually sheriff sales. The County will begin using those means, and possibly a list of the top delinquent account holders on its Web site, to continue collections.

County Council President Vance C. Phillips said he was pleased so many delinquent account holders stepped up to settle their debts, but disappointed others ignored the opportunity.

Additionally, Mr. Phillips said it is unfair to those property owners who have faithfully paid their taxes to allow others to slip through the cracks, and that is why the County must move forward in pursuing delinquent payers.

“We recognize that the 18 percent annual interest rate on property taxes is substantial,” Mr. Phillips said. “This program has been successful at collecting back taxes without rewarding the delinquent in an inequitable way.”

###