



THE PORTNOFF REPORTER

WINTER 2017

Happy New Year!



The start of a new year often brings with it some uncertainty, given the financial struggles that Pennsylvania municipalities continually face. Between rising health insurance and prescription costs, unfunded mandates and increasing pension costs, the one certainty is that every penny matters. Choosing between raising taxes and user rates or cutting services and programs frequently leads to difficult, and sometimes unpopular, decisions. In light of these challenges, it is imperative to take control over those aspects of your budget that you can still influence. One such area is the collection of delinquent accounts. Leaving past-due revenue on the street means less money to pay your current expenses. For over 28 years, Portnoff Law Associates has helped municipalities, school districts and municipal authorities maximize the collection of their delinquent real estate taxes and municipal fees. Contact PLA to find out how we can help you start off the new year strong with more money in your account.



PORTNOFF
LAW ASSOCIATES, LTD.

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Employee Spotlight

Susan Anderson

Susan Anderson has been with Portnoff Law Associates since 1999. Susan started as a part-time legal secretary and soon moved into the position of Legal Secretary Supervisor. Since 2007, she has held the position of Executive Secretary to firm president, Michelle R. Portnoff. Susan is a member of Portnoff's



business development team, coordinating marketing meetings, production of The Portnoff Reporter, publicity and client events. She is frequently a client's first point of contact with Portnoff Law Associates and is always available for a quick question or special request.

Susan is a life-long resident of Delaware County and enjoys entertaining, doing crossword puzzles and spending time with her husband, her two grown daughters and extended family.

In Person

Mar.
2017

Portnoff Law Associates will be attending the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials (PASBO) Annual Conference at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh, PA on March 21-24. Please feel free to stop by our booth (#709).

Apr.
2017

Portnoff attorney Kevin Buraks will be presenting a seminar titled "Increase Revenue by Maximizing Delinquent Collections" at the Annual Educational Conference of the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors (PSATS) on April 24, 2017 at the Hershey Lodge in Hershey, PA. Portnoff will have a booth in the exhibit hall throughout the Conference.

Portnoff Law Associates will be attending the Pennsylvania Government Finance Officers Association (PA-GFOA) Annual Statewide Conference at the Penn Stater Hotel in State College, PA on April 23-26. Please stop by our booth in the exhibit hall.

If you are interested in having Portnoff Law Associates make a presentation at your next conference or event, please contact us at (800) 561-7989.

Local Event Idea

Destination Blues Music Festival Columbia and Montour Counties February 17-19

Are you ready to take the chill out of your winter with some warm blues music? Then check out the 4th Annual Destination Blues Music Festival on February 17-19 in Columbia and Montour Counties. Headlining this year's festival are The Otis Taylor Band and Leah Gilmore. Most of the performances take place in family-friendly restaurants and bars with no cover charge. For more information, go to the event website at: www.destinationblues.org.

Notes of Appreciation

Portnoff Law Associates was honored to recently receive the following notes of appreciation complimenting members of our customer service team who work directly with delinquent property owners:

Today I had the double pleasure of confirming that [my delinquent] Real Estate Taxes were paid in full and speaking with Venus, your representative who answered my call.

Venus was pleasant, competent and so very helpful. I particularly appreciated how she anticipated questions about the lien on the house and a paid-in-full statement.

It's embarrassing to get behind on one's taxes. Venus treated me [with] dignity and the situation sensitively. ...Because Venus was so pleasant, I wouldn't hesitate to call if I needed more information than your website provides.

I congratulate you on having a great representative like Venus.

A Property Owner from
Allentown, PA

Dachi, Thank you for being very kind to me, and a great worker!!! God Bless.

A Property Owner from
Rochester, PA

Customer Service 101

Payment Plans

Given that the goal of most municipalities in the collection of delinquent accounts is to bring in as much revenue as possible, it makes sense to implement procedures that will facilitate payment. One such approach is to permit the payment of obligations over time. With the challenging economic conditions that many individuals face, all-or-none demands for payment will frequently result in none. To combat this problem, we recommend that our clients allow for payment plans to help maximize collections. Portnoff’s standard monthly payment plans are staggered based on the amount of the delinquency. For balances that are \$500 or less, we request payment in full within 30 days. For balances between \$501 and \$1,500, we allow for a three-month payment plan. For accounts with balances over \$1,500, we permit a six-month payment plan. When it comes to payment plans, some leniency is better than no leniency, so long as the plan is not extended out too long, as this may increase that probability of another delinquency on the next bill. Exceptions can be made for true hardship situations on a case-by-case basis.

The above payment plans are simply recommendations, as Portnoff clients can tailor the length of available plans to best meet their needs. The ability to retain local control over this aspect of the collection process is a big benefit of collecting delinquencies under the Municipal Claims and Tax Liens Act (MCTLA). For tax collections made by the county, the tax claim bureau is required to follow the procedures of the Real Estate Tax Sale Law (RETSL). Unlike the MCTLA, the RETSL procedures are rigid, with significantly less payment plan options and decision-making control lying solely with the county instead of the local municipality. Under the MCTLA, municipalities retain full control to decide how best to collect their delinquencies and what type of payment plans to allow.

Hiring Portnoff

Portnoff Law Associates represents over 135 municipalities, school districts and municipal authorities across Pennsylvania. Portnoff’s proven collection process can be tailored to meet your specific collection needs. With all collection costs charged to the delinquent property owner, Portnoff clients can collect 100% of their delinquent principal, penalty and interest at minimal cost to the municipality. We are available to meet with you to discuss the benefits of our services. If you are interested in hearing more about how Portnoff can help maximize your delinquent collections, please contact us at (800) 561-7989 or sanderson@portnoffonline.com.

Legal Update

Out-of-State Collections

Many Pennsylvania municipalities, school districts and municipal authorities seek to collect their delinquent real estate taxes and municipal claims under the Municipal Claims and Tax Liens Act (the “MCTLA”). Service of notices under the MCTLA, and of legal pleadings in general, is required to satisfy the court that the delinquent property owner received notice of the action taken against the property.

While the MCTLA exclusively concerns delinquent collections on property located in Pennsylvania, collection efforts often extend outside of state boundaries. The efforts required to provide notice to out-of-state property owners places increased burdens on the municipal body. Under Section 7186 of the MCTLA, if the property owner is known to reside out-of-state, service of the writ must be done by advertising a copy of the writ, or a brief notice of the contents of the same, once a week for three successive weeks in a newspaper of general circulation in the county where the property is located and in the legal periodical designated by the county court for that purpose. Where the writ, or notice of its contents, has been advertised as required, such advertising is deemed to have the same effect as if the writ had been personally served on the property owner.

While the increased burden of advertising to obtain service on out-of-state property owners may delay action and increase the collection costs, it is a necessary step to ensure compliance with Pennsylvania law. At Portnoff Law Associates, we handle this complicated process on behalf of our clients. All hard advertising costs are advanced by PLA and charged directly to the delinquent property owner, allowing our clients to collect 100% of the principal, penalty and interest due.

By the Numbers

29,381	Number of accounts placed with PLA over the last 5 years for Pennsylvania properties with out-of-state owners
50	Number of states where property owners have resided who owed delinquent taxes or municipal claims to PLA clients
40	Number of territories and foreign countries where property owners have resided who owed delinquent taxes or municipal claims to PLA clients
\$28 million	Approximate principal balance placed with PLA over the last 5 years for delinquencies owed by out-of-state property owners



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YOUR TRUSTED LEGAL TEAM FOR COLLECTING DELINQUENT REAL ESTATE TAXES AND MUNICIPAL FEES

With over 28 years of experience in the field, Portnoff Law Associates currently represents over 135 municipalities, school districts and municipal authorities in the collection of delinquent:

- Real Estate Taxes
- Abatement of Nuisance Fees
- Tapping Fees
- Trash Fees
- Sewer Fees
- Water Bills



Michelle Portnoff, President
Portnoff Law Associates

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