

February 6, 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Mike Strong, Assessor, 530-822-7160

Sutter County Assessor Says There's No Charge To Appeal Assessments

Mail Solicitations Charging \$179 To File Applications Referred To DA For Review

YUBA CITY—A Los Angeles company's offer to charge Sutter County property owners \$179 for something they can do for free has been referred to the District Attorney for possible investigation of criminal wrongdoing.

Mailers, sent on official looking forms and promising to lower property tax bills in Sutter County, are probably a scam, said Sutter County Assessor Mike Strong.

In a letter to District Attorney Carl Adams, Mr. Strong on Friday called the mailers "outrageous" and "highly unethical" and asked the DA to determine if they were also illegal.

The mailers are not affiliated with the county or any government agency in anyway and provide nothing that a property owner cannot already achieve for free. The Assessor's office began receiving telephone calls about the mailers on Friday morning.

The mailers offer to file claims for reassessment of the property valuations for a fee of \$179. Sutter County does not charge a fee when property owners want to have their property assessments appealed, and the Assessor's Office provides free assistance in going through the process.

"There is no need for anyone to pay such an outrageous 'service fee' for representation in an appeal," Mr. Strong said. "It costs nothing to file a claim for reassessment with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors and it can be done by the property owner. Also, plenty of information is available as to the process and we are always happy to assist the public with any questions."

The mailer, which is designed to look like an official government document, states that property owners have only until Feb. 26 to send \$179 or they will face a \$30 "late fee." It also states that it will file "all necessary forms immediately."

Mr. Strong stated that the dates have no relationship to the assessment appeals process. The deadline for appealing assessments in 2008-2009 was last September. The beginning date of the appeal process for 2009-2010 is not until July 2.

“If this mailing is not an outright scam, then it certainly is highly unethical, as it preys on people who are not knowledgeable about the assessment and appeals process,” Mr. Strong wrote to the DA.

Mr. Strong stated that his office is currently working on the property tax roll for the 2009-2010 fiscal year, and that the assessments will be based on market values as of Jan. 1, 2009.

Mr. Strong said the valuations on more than 4,500 properties in Sutter County have been reduced. “We anticipate that there will be further reductions in valuations this year as the market values clearly continued to slide in 2008,” he said. “If, after the property assessment letters are mailed out this year, a property owner believes the assessment is incorrect, there is no reason to pay someone a fee for filing the appeal that will result in a review of our assessment by the Sutter County Assessment Appeals Board. The property owner can file a claim for free with the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors.

The appeal dates for 2009 are July 2 through Sept. 15. Claim forms are available online by visiting the Assessor’s Office website at www.suttercounty.org.