Bernard F. Crowley, Jr.
Acting Commissioner

Joseph J. Chessey, Jr.
Deputy Commissioner

City and Town

A Publication of the Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services

Volume 14, No. 7 October 2001

Quality Health Care and Reasonable Costs Are Not Mutually Exclusive Objectives

Cynthia McGrath, Communications Director, Group Insurance Commission

Governmental entities and private employers are grappling with providing employees and retirees with access to quality health care while simultaneously trying to contain costs. According to one major benefits consultant, plans in the northeast will demand an average of 15 percent increases for 2002. The reasons for escalating costs are many, including:

- an aging population;
- rising prescription drug costs;
- greater use of expensive new technologies;
- a need to stabilize the financial positions of area health plans and providers; and
- opposition from providers, patients, and legislators to managed care cost containment, limiting expensive and sometimes unnecessary procedures and tests for patients, reducing hospital stays, and holding down fees to hospitals and doctors.

"It is a dynamic environment, and employers have an important role to play by demanding improved care which helps to contain costs," said Dolores L. Mitchell, executive director of the Commonwealth's Group Insurance Commission, the agency that manages benefits for state employees and retirees. As the state's largest employer purchaser of health care, the GIC has taken the lead in improving quality care and containing costs. The GIC has tackled these seemingly incompatible objectives on many fronts.

Advocating Improved Patient Safety

In 1999 the Institute of Medicine published a startling report estimating that 44,000 to 98,000 people die each year as the result of preventable medical errors in hospitals. Medical errors kill more Americans than motor vehicle accidents, breast cancer or AIDS, and cost the nation's health care system an estimated $8.8 billion annually.

The GIC took a leading role in tackling this problem. The GIC adopted standards for its new health plan contracts, corresponding to those developed by the Leapfrog Group, a national coalition of large employers that is addressing patient safety. These standards include computerized physician entry of prescriptions in the hospital, intensive care unit staffing by physicians certified in critical care, and hospital volume for five high-risk procedures and two high-risk deliveries. "These standards save lives and our HMOs will track this data," said Dolores L. Mitchell. "We will, in turn, provide this information to enrollees to assist with their inpatient treatment decisions."

Instituting Risk Intervention, Drug Intervention, and Disease Management Programs

Better communication between a patient's providers, and between the patient and his or her primary care physician, improves quality of care, reduces the opportunity for mistakes, and decreases costs. The GIC has been on the forefront of improving this communication.

PPO Risk Intervention Program. The GIC's Commonwealth Preferred Provider Organization (PPO) includes a new program addressing its concern with detecting inappropriate care, as well as reducing medical errors. The Early Risk Intervention Program combines physician expertise with cutting edge software to detect potential health care errors. By bringing these issues to the attention of the patient's treating physician, care can be modified ensuring that the best, most appropriate care is delivered, or that inappropriate, possibly harmful care is avoided.

New Drug Intervention Program. The GIC implemented a new drug intervention program for its Indemnity and Commonwealth PPO enrollees. If an enrollees' prescription raises concerns for potentially harmful interactions, the pharmacy benefit manager contacts the patients' physician to alert him or her so that possible harm can be avoided.

Disease Management Programs. The GIC initiated a number of disease man-

continued on page six

Inside This Issue

From the Deputy Commissioner 2

Legal
City Not Liable for Accident 2

Focus
Senior Property Tax Relief 3
Chapter 40B Amendments 6

DLS Update
Farmland Valuation. 7
DOR Reporting Requirement 7

DLS Profile 8

From the Deputy Commissioner

There are several reasons why the balance sheet is a key financial record. For example, the calculation of free cash is based on the balance sheet as of June 30. Local officials rely upon the balance sheet to evaluate their community's financial strengths and weaknesses. The Department of Revenue, banks, investors and federal grant agencies also review audited balance sheets to assess a community's financial position.

A major component of the balance sheet is the assets — cash and accounts receivable. The assets listed are based on information reported to the accountant by the collector and treasurer and should reconcile with the collector and treasurer's records. If cash or receivable variances exist between these offices, then it may raise questions about the accuracy of the balance sheet and the financial position of the town.

The Division recommends that financial officers conduct monthly reconciliations of the assets. Many communities have learned the hard way that improperly recorded transactions can lead to a state of disorder requiring months to untangle, and jeopardize public funds and the credibility of local officials. I encourage local officials to seek assistance with this important process. If you have questions, please contact your Bureau of Accounts field advisor. In addition, the Municipal Data Management/Technical Assistance Bureau is available to review municipal financial operations.

Joseph J. Chessey, Jr.
Deputy Commissioner

Legal

in Our Opinion

City Not Liable for Sledding Accident

by James Crowley

In April the Supreme Judicial Court (SJC) ruled that the City of Lynn was exempt from liability under the discretionary function exception of the Massachusetts Tort Claims Act for the wrongful death of a child and serious injuries to another child caused by sledding on snow-covered stairs at High Rock Tower in Lynn. The decision is *Barnett v. City of Lynn*, 433 Mass. 662 (2001).

In January 1996, two children sledded down stairs that provided access to a playground from Essex Street. When they reached the bottom of the stairs, they catapulted into the street where they were hit in mid-air by a passing automobile. The impact immediately caused the death of the young girl and severe injuries to her brother.

The plaintiff, their mother, brought suit in superior court alleging the city was negligent for failing to (1) construct a barrier to prevent sledding; (2) shovel, salt or sand the steps; and (3) post warning signs alerting the public to the danger of sledding on the stairs. The city filed a motion for summary judgment on the grounds of immunity from liability under the discretionary function exception of the Tort Claims Act. The superior court judge granted the motion. The plaintiff immediately appealed, and the SJC agreed to hear the case on direct appeal.

The SJC looked to M.G.L. Ch. 258 Sec. 10(b) which exempts municipalities from tort liability for "any claim based upon the exercise or performance or the failure to exercise or perform a discretionary function or duty on the part of a public employer or public employee, acting within the scope of his office or employment, whether or not the discretion is abused." The court had to determine whether the city had discretion as to its action, and, if so, whether the exercise of that discretion was immunized under the statute. In the court's view, the city had complete discretion in deciding whether to build a fence, remove snow or post warning signs. The court found no statute or agency policy regarding snow accumulation. Furthermore, this discretionary conduct involved policy judgment and making choices which were protected under the discretionary function exception. The court ruled that the City of Lynn, due to limited financial resources, had discretion in spending money on snow removal and securing public safety.

The court emphasized, however, that M.G.L. Ch. 258 Sec. 10(b) would not immunize the city if there were a previously established policy or plan. For example, the city's failure to build a fence was a protected discretionary function. If a fence were constructed, however, the city's failure to maintain a fence would not be a discretionary function. Similarly, a decision to remove snow only around schools or municipal buildings was a discretionary act. Negligently shoveling, salting or sanding steps, however, would not be protected under the Tort Claims Act.

The plaintiff in *Barnett* also contended that the city abused its discretion since city officials knew that children for many years used the stairs for sledding. The city also sanded the stairs after this deadly accident to prevent other children from being injured. In the court's view, it did not matter whether the city's actions were unreasonable since the statute immunized municipalities even where there was an abuse of discretion. By its terms, M.G.L. Ch. 258 Sec. 10(b) immunized the city "whether or not the discretion involved is abused."

continued on page five

Focus

on Municipal Finance

Senior Property Tax Relief

by Joan Grourke

Table 1 provided by Kathleen Colleary

Widespread concern has arisen among many state and local officials and various organizations about the ability of many senior citizens to pay their increasing property tax bills. This concern has been fueled in part by a review of property tax exemptions for the elderly that was issued by the state auditor's office in December 1998. That report concluded that fewer and fewer seniors are able to qualify because the limits have not been adjusted to reflect changes in the cost of living. Also, the report found that the amount of the exemption, $500, had not been increased since 1978.

This article provides a brief overview of the various senior property tax relief programs, including property tax exemptions, work programs and the senior "circuit breaker" state income tax credit. It also examines a number of recent legislative actions designed to increase property tax relief for senior citizens. *Table 1* summarizes the different types of assistance and recent efforts to increase that assistance.

Real Estate Tax Exemptions

Clauses 41, 41B and 41C of Section 5 of Chapter 59 provide exemptions to persons 70 years of age or older who satisfy certain whole estate or asset, annual income and residency requirements. There has been some discussion among legislators to raise the income and asset standards of the Clause 41 exemptions, but no legislative action has occurred to date. Persons 70 or older may, alternatively, qualify for an exemption under Clauses 17, 17C, 17C½ or 17D. Although these options provide reduced benefits, the eligibility requirements are less strict.

Clause 17 Exemption Benefit Increase. A few years ago, legislation was enacted that allowed cities and towns, by local option, to increase the Clause 17s $175 exemption amount by up to 100 percent of the annual cost of living adjustment.[1] First, a community must accept Ch. 181 of 1995 (a provision of M.G. L. Ch. 59 Sec. 5) and then determine the percentage increase that will apply.

Clause 17 Asset Limit Increase and Clause 41 Income and Asset Limit Increase. Legislation was also enacted at the end of the 2000 legislative session that added two new local options provisions, M.G.L. Ch. 59 Sec. 5 (17E) and (41D). If accepted, these provisions allow cities and towns to increase the income and asset limits that apply to senior exemptions. If the new M.G.L. Ch. 59 Sec.5 (17E) is accepted, the whole estate limits that apply to applicants for Clause 17, 17C, 17C½ and 17D exemptions will automatically increase annually by the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Acceptance of the new M.G.L. Ch. 59 Sec.5 (41D) will automatically increase both the gross receipts and whole asset limits that apply to applicants for Clause 41, 41B and 41C exemptions each year by the CPI.

These three local options are independent. In other words, communities may accept none or, one, two, or all three options. Also, each option has a cumulative impact, i.e., the adjusted amount is the base for the next year's adjustment. Acceptance of these options does not increase the amount of state reimbursement received by the city or town for the applicable exemption clause. For Clauses 17E and 41D, the Commissioner of Revenue will notify the assessors of the annual CPI increases, just as they annually notify the assessors of the maximum CPI adjustment to the Clause 17s exemption amount since that provision's enactment.

Senior Work Programs

Municipal Employment. Over the past few years, several cities and towns have instituted programs whereby funds are appropriated to hire seniors to perform needed work for the community at a specified hourly rate. Usually, there are certain eligibility requirements, such as income criteria, that are determined locally. For example, seniors can usually earn up to a specified amount, such as $500. All of the program features are determined locally.

Instead of giving the seniors a paycheck, the treasurer issues vouchers for their net earnings. Seniors then take the vouchers to the collector's office to have them applied against their property taxes, or other municipal charges, such as water or sewer bills. Alternatively, upon joining the program, the seniors agree to have their net earnings credited directly to their bills.

In Freetown, for example, seniors work in various town offices. According to Karen Mello, assistant assessor, the seniors are especially needed in offices that are ordinarily staffed by just one person, such as the town clerk. Freetown adopted this program last year and has about 10 participants. The town has provided information about the program primarily through the senior center newsletter.

These programs have proved popular in other communities, as well. Under these programs, participating seniors do not receive an abatement or an exemption. They are employees receiving earned income.

Senior Work-Off Abatement Program. Enacted in 1999, M.G.L. Ch. 59 Sec. 5K enables cities and towns to create a local option senior volunteer program patterned after these local work programs. Town meeting, town council or

continued on page five

Programs to Assist Senior Homeowners Pay Their Property Taxes

	Property tax relief			Work programs		Income tax credit
Program name	**Elderly exemption (Clause 17s)**	**Elderly exemption (Clause 41s)**	**Senior deferral (Clause 41A)**	**Senior work-off abatement (G.L. Ch. 59 § 5K)**	**Municipal employment**	**Senior "circuit breaker" tax credit** (as of 1/1/2001)
Assistance type	Reduces local property tax liability of senior	Reduces local property tax liability of senior	Defers payment of local property tax owed by senior until house sold or senior dies	Reduces local property tax liability of senior in exchange for volunteer service to municipality	Provides supplemental income to help senior pay local property taxes (or water, sewer or other local charges)	Reduces state income taxes owed (or provides refund if none owed) for senior whose property taxes (and 50% of water/sewer charges) exceed 10% of income
Eligible age	70	70	65	60	Varies locally	65
Income limit	None	Single $6,000–13,000* maximum Married $7,000–15,000* maximum	$20,000 maximum	Varies locally	Varies locally	Single $40,000 maximum Married $60,000 maximum
Asset limit	$20,00–40,000* maximum	Single $17,000–28,000* maximum Married $20,000–30,000* maximum	None	Varies locally	Varies locally	$400,000 on assessed valuation of domicile, if homeowner
Assistance amount	$175 exemption	$500 exemption	Any amount up to maximum deferral (taxes and interest at 8%) of 50% of senior's share of fair cash value of domicile	$500 maximum abatement State minimum wage ($6.75 as of 1/1/2001) maximum hourly rate	Varies locally	2001 — $375 maximum credit 2002 — $750 maximum credit
Inflation adjustment	Annual increase in **asset limit** — requires legislative body acceptance of G.L. Ch. 59 § 5(17E) Annual increase in **exemption amount** — requires legislative body acceptance of G.L. Ch. 59 § 5 provision added by St. 1995, Ch. 181 *and* vote on percent increase	Annual increase in "minimum social security/retirement" **exclusion from income limit** by DOR Annual increase in **income and asset limit** — requires legislative body acceptance of G.L. Ch. 59 § 5(41D)	Optional increase in **income limit** up to $40,000 — requires legislative body vote to fix limit	None	Varies locally	Automatic annual increase in income limits, assessed valuation and credit amount by statute
Application procedure	Senior files application with local assessors	Senior files application with local assessors	Senior files application with local assessors	Varies locally	Varies locally	Senior files state income tax return with MA DOR (*not* DLS). Call Taxpayer Service at 617-887-6367 or 1-800-392-6089

*Depends on clause that applies in community.

Table 1

Senior Property Tax Relief **continued from page three**

city council must first vote to accept the law. After acceptance, the selectmen, town council or mayor may then develop a work program for persons 60 years and older. Under this program, seniors will earn an actual reduction (i.e., abatement) of their property tax in exchange for volunteering services to the community.

In contrast to the senior work programs that have features that are determined locally, state law establishes the senior work-off abatement program benefits. For example, the maximum reduction is $500 for each fiscal year. Also, the amount of the reduction is based on an hourly rate per hour of volunteer service that cannot exceed the state minimum wage ($6.75 as of 1/1/2001).

Another distinguishing feature of this program is that the earned reduction is shown as an abatement on the tax bill and charged to the overlay account. In other words, unlike the senior work programs, funding is not through appropriation. The law also makes it clear that any earned amount is not income for any state purpose, such as state income tax, unemployment and workman's compensation. This is the other primary difference from the senior work programs. The law does not have any impact on federal tax treatment, however.

The municipality should establish, preferably through by-law or ordinance, consistent rules and procedures for the program. Program rules should establish age, income, domicile and other eligibility standards the community considers appropriate for ensuring that the intended seniors benefit.

Under the Senior Municipal Work Program in Lexington, about 20 participants work for the town and school department. Seniors may earn an actual reduction (i.e., abatement to their property tax bill) up to $500. However, they must meet certain income criteria: for single seniors, annual income may not exceed $36,750; for married seniors, annual income cannot exceed $42,000. The town notifies residents of the program through the senior center newsletter and also by including notices along with the tax bills. According to the program coordinator, many seniors who participate voluntarily work above and beyond the amount of hours needed to earn the $500 abatement.

Senior Circuit Breaker State Income Tax Credit

The most comprehensive of recent efforts to provide more property tax relief to seniors was the enactment of the senior circuit breaker. This program provides relief at the state level in the form of a refundable state income tax credit[2] to eligible homeowners and renters beginning in tax year 2001.

Seniors 65 or older are eligible for the credit if they have income at or below $40,000 if single and $60,000 if married. In addition, if they are homeowners, the assessed valuation of their domicile must be at or below $400,000.

The income tax credit is the amount by which the senior's property taxes and 50 percent of their water and sewer bills exceeds 10 percent of their income. The maximum credit for the upcoming 2001 filing season is $375. In tax year 2002 the maximum credit will be $750.

A senior who rents his or her domicile may also qualify for an income tax credit under this legislation. For calculation purposes, the statute presumes that 25 percent of a person's rent is for property taxes and water and sewer bills. Therefore, the program entitles a senior who rents his or her domicile to a credit if 25 percent of that senior's rent exceeds 10 percent of his or her income, again up to the statutory limits.

This legislation includes provisions to adjust the income, assessed valuation and credit amounts by the consumer price index so they will keep pace with inflation. ■

1. The cost of living adjustment is measured by the increase in the consumer price index (CPI) during the previous calendar year. The cost of living adjustment for FY2002 exemption purposes is 4.9 percent. The Commissioner of Revenue annually notifies communities of the maximum CPI adjustment permitted (usually in March).

2. The circuit breaker provides relief in the form of an income tax credit and therefore, the Department of Revenue's (DOR) Tax Administration division administers it. Please contact DOR's Customer Service Bureau at (617) 887-MDOR or 1-800-392-6089 for further information.

Legal **continued from page two**

Finally, the plaintiff argued that the discretionary function exception should not apply since the city's failure to post warning signs did not rise to the level of policymaking or planning. The court rejected this argument. According to the court, it was common sense even to a 12-year-old child that it would be dangerous to sled down stairs leading to a street heavily trafficked by motor vehicles. The court wrote that, where danger is open and notorious, visitors must exercise reasonable care for their own safety. Consequently, the city had no legal duty to post signs and could not be held liable for any injuries. The SJC, therefore, upheld the lower court decision in favor of the city. ■

 continued from page one

agement programs through its Indemnity Plan, including a Diabetes Management Program and a program targeting enrollees with chronic health conditions. Survey results indicate that participants' health improved. They learned more about how to manage their condition, and could recommend these programs to others.

Giving Enrollees Cost Sharing Choices

GIC enrollees have a number of health care options including an Indemnity Plan, a PPO, and seven Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) plans. Enrollees pay more for fewer restrictions and wider provider networks. Similarly, the GIC instituted a three-tier co-pay structure for the Indemnity Plan and PPO pharmacy program benefits which provides an incentive for using medications that are safe, effective and less costly, while maintaining a broad choice of covered drugs.

The GIC Encourages Enrollees to Take Charge of Their Health

The GIC's communication efforts continue to evolve to complement, promote, and ensure the delivery of quality health care at a reasonable cost. The GIC's quarterly newsletter includes articles devoted to ways enrollees can promote their own health and well-being. The GIC also provides enrollees with a report card on quality care of its HMOs, based on criteria established by the National Center for Quality Assurance.

GIC staff collaborate with a number of governmental and private organizations to improve quality care and contain costs, including the Massachusetts Healthcare Purchasers Group, the Massachusetts Health Data Consortium, the Massachusetts Compassionate Care Coalition, and the Health Care Committee of Associated Industries of Massachusetts.

"We believe it is our responsibility as a large purchaser of health care to pioneer new ways to improve quality of health care, while keeping costs reasonable for enrollees and the citizens of the Commonwealth," said Dolores L. Mitchell. For more information about the Leapfrog Group, visit www.leapfrog.org. Additional information about the GIC and its initiatives are on our website at www.state.ma.us/gic. ■

The Group Insurance Commission is a quasi-independent state agency that provides and administers health insurance and other benefits to the Commonwealth's employees and retirees, and their dependents and survivors. The GIC also covers housing and redevelopment authorities' personnel, and retired municipal employees and teachers in certain governmental units. The GIC's requested budget for FY2002 is more than $710 million. The commission is comprised of 11 members, encompassing a range of interests and expertise including labor, retirees, the public interest, the administration, and health economics. The governor appoints members to the commission.

Chapter 40B Amendments

In August 2001, the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) filed amendments to its regulations governing comprehensive permit applications under Chapter 40B. These changes will become part of the Chapter 40B implementing regulations at 760 CMR 30.00 and 31.00.

Chapter 40B stipulates that every community should have at least 10 percent of its housing affordable to low- and moderate-income families on a long-term basis. To help achieve that goal, Chapter 40B authorizes comprehensive permits to be issued with limited exemptions from local zoning regulations in exchange for affordable housing production.

While Chapter 40B serves as an incentive for housing production, a number of communities have had concerns about the law's implementation requirements.

The revisions crafted by DHCD are designed to strengthen Chapter 40B and maintain its effectiveness in creating affordable housing, while also addressing the concerns of communities statewide.

Under these amendments, communities will be able to:

- allow zoning boards of appeal to refuse comprehensive permits for large-scale projects that are inappropriately sized based on the community;
- let zoning boards of appeal deny comprehensive permits for one year when a community has demonstrated good faith progress toward reaching the 10 percent goal in the previous year;
- require developers to wait one year after using Chapter 40B to obtain other desired zoning approval, eliminating the ability of developers to use 40B as a threat;
- count affordable homes in a community's inventory immediately upon the approval of a comprehensive permit without waiting for the approval of a building or occupancy permit, which is current policy;
- require the inclusion of certain program information in site eligibility letters from subsidizing agencies and allow a 30-day comment period to ensure communities get consistent information;
- include private housing which serves mentally ill or retarded residents in a city or town's overall goals; and
- increase the terms of affordability on subsidized housing to boost the number of years these homes stay affordable (15 years for rehabilitated housing and 30 years for newly created homes). ■

DLS Update

Farmland Valuation

by Brenda Cameron

Last winter, the Division of Local Services' Bureau of Local Assessment awarded the contract to evaluate methodologies to determine the range of "use values" for certain agricultural and horticultural land under M.G.L. c. 61A to First Pioneer Farm Credit of Enfield, Connecticut.

The consultant, First Pioneer, commenced work in February with a team of appraisers from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire and New York. The study team reviewed current methodology and investigated other approaches for the valuation of all agricultural and horticultural land on the basis of use, determined the availability of verifiable data to be used in applying these methods and determined the feasibility of collecting such data. During the process, the appraisers from First Pioneer also reviewed the methodologies from other states such as Wisconsin, New Jersey, Maine, Michigan and Oregon and commented on whether those practices would be adaptable for Massachusetts' farmland valuation.

After several months of analyzing and studying the various methodologies, the consultant made its recommendations in a report received by the Bureau of Local Assessment on May 16. This report was forwarded to members of the Farmland Valuation Advisory Committee (FVAC) and the Farmland Valuation Advisory Technical Subcommittee (FVATS).

FVATS reviewed the two approaches recommended by the study team. The first was a Land Rent Capitalization model, which was based on a statewide survey of farmers in determining the current use value for Massachusetts' farmland. Due to an inadequate number of cranberry bog rents in Massachusetts, the report suggested an imputed rental rate for cranberry bogs based on rental practices for the remainder of Massachusetts' agriculture, thereby determining the gross income per acre for cranberries. This approach was well received by the FVATS but was discounted for fiscal year 2002 for two administrative reasons. First, this approach would require appropriations by the Legislature to conduct a baseline study of farm rental rates in Massachusetts, and require it to be updated periodically. Currently no legislative appropriation exists. Second, a survey of this magnitude would not be completed in time to set fiscal year 2002 farmland valuations.

The second recommended approach was a Net Income Capitalization model based on the methodology utilized in New Jersey. This methodology develops farmland values for all farmland categories using readily available data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The recommended valuations are based on a combination of factors, including land use and agricultural productivity, soil type, net farm income and a capitalization rate. Agricultural land is assigned to one of six farmland categories and an income weight is assigned to each category, e.g. category with the highest income potential (harvested cropland) is assigned the highest income weight. The state's capitalized income value is divided by the total weighted acreage figure for all classes combined resulting in a dollar value. This dollar value is multiplied by the acreage income weight to arrive at a per acre value. The per acre value is then multiplied by the soil rating, which is based on the general soil characteristics related to soil productivity. The resulting figure is the recommended farmland valuation for the land class.

The Net Income Capitalization model was unanimously supported by the FVATS because it is a sound appraisal technique that yields a reasonable and uniform result. Administratively, it had the ability to be implemented for the current fiscal year and did not require a significant monetary expense.

On July 12, 2001, the Farmland Valuation Advisory Commission met to discuss the merits of the Farmland Study performed by First Pioneer and the recommendation of the FVATS. The members of the First Pioneer study team made a presentation of their findings and answered numerous questions on the various recommendations in the report. After a lengthy debate on these methodologies, FVAC voted to adopt a five-year Capitalization of Net Income approach for valuing Massachusetts' farmland.

The FVAC recommended values for land classified under Chapter 61A was issued to all cities and towns in the Commonwealth on July 20 and is available on the DOR website.

DOR Reporting Requirement

A recent Department of Revenue (DOR) compliance review revealed that not all cities and towns are complying with state and federal law requiring them to report their newly hired and reinstated employees and independent contractors to DOR. Failure to report can result in penalties.

Since 1993, in accordance with M.G.L. Ch. 62E § 2, Massachusetts has required all employers, including municipalities, to report newly hired and reinstated employees to DOR within 14 days of hire. For cities and towns, this includes all departments and the public schools, as well as seasonal and temporary workers. An amendment to

continued on page eight

DLS Profile: CAMA Support Staff

The Information Technology (IT) section of the Division of Local Services (DLS) provides training, support and consulting services to communities using the Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal and Tax Administration System (CAMA). This software is used by local finance officials for in-house revaluation and tax administration functions, such as tax billing and collections. This past year, IT worked on developing the new Oracle-based Version 2 of CAMA. Currently, 80 cities and towns depend on DLS for support and training in the use of CAMA.

Linda Bradley

Linda Bradley and **Paul Corbett** are two veteran staff members who assist and train local officials in the use of CAMA. Linda has worked in DLS for 20 years, and Paul has worked for the Division for 17 years. While Linda and Paul spend a large portion of their time working on site with local officials in their offices, they also provide remote support. Both Linda and Paul began working for the Division as field appraisers for the Bureau of Local Assessment. As a result, they have thorough knowledge of real and personal property valuation issues.

Paul Corbett

CAMA is used by cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth. Local officials who use CAMA find the assistance provided by DLS invaluable.

"I've used CAMA since I started working here about 10 years ago. I couldn't ask for anyone better than Linda. She has the patience of a saint! I have come a long way with CAMA because of the time Linda has spent with me." — Lynn Olivia, Assistant Collector, Berkley

"Paul is a very valuable asset to the state's CAMA program. I have worked with him for about 10 years. He is very knowledgeable — both in terms of computers and field appraisal. You don't often find someone with both qualifications." — Richard Gonsalves, Assessor, Seekonk ■

Update continued from page seven

the state law in 1998 added independent contractors, such as consultants or vendors who will be paid more than $600 in a year, to the reporting requirement.

DOR is aware that municipalities may handle the reporting of new hires and independent contractors in varying ways. However, it is the responsibility of the individual town or city to ensure that the appropriate departments are made aware of this important legal obligation. Information on reporting requirements and reporting options may be found on DOR's website, www.massdor.com, (click on "New Hire Reporting System"), by calling 1-800-332-2733 or sending an e-mail inquiry to PDUmail@shore.net. ■

City & Town
City & Town is published by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Division of Local Services (DLS) and is designed to address matters of interest to local officials.

Joan E. Grourke, *Editor*

To obtain information or publications, contact the Division of Local Services via:
• website: www.massdor.com
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7.5M 10/01 GC02C02

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