

COUNTY OF RICHLAND
OFFICE OF COUNTY TREASURER



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Letter to the Editor

From: David A. Adams, Richland County Treasurer

Every year the County Audit reports on weaknesses in the county's bookkeeping. This annual diagnosis is a management tool for Government to gauge our success, strengthen our financial operations and continue to improve our systems.

An article in The State recently reported that there were problems with Richland County's financial books for 2003-2004. Of the 94 items listed as "deficient" in the story, only two were the responsibility of the Richland County Treasurer's Office.

As an elected official, I took responsibility for the deficiencies and fixed them ... a year ago.

I attempted to convey the realities of last year's Audit to the newspaper's reporter. Sadly, The State's story took some information out of context and created a misperception about the County Treasurer's Office.

The article portrayed a County that was adrift instead of a government that is steadily improving over years past. We have made wholesale changes in two short years that have professionalized the County Treasury's operations and strengthened our financial reporting - all done to better protect the tax dollars entrusted to us.

Two months after becoming County Treasurer in 2003 the same external auditor provided a report which detailed twenty-five (25) serious problems from the previous year's Treasurer's operations. Upon receiving that letter, in our first days with the County, we instituted dozens of office policies and standards. We worked diligently to fix those problems, root out inefficiencies and build strong internal controls.

Since that report, in my first months as Treasurer, we reduced the Treasury's financial weaknesses by 92% according to the independent auditor (25 problems from the year before I took office down to 2 in last year's report).

For the first time, the Treasurer's Office provides a monthly report to County Council that details collections and investment returns. For the first time, we are closing our books each month to give a more accurate picture of the County's financial position. For the first time our office is depositing collected funds by the following business day.

We made these advances in the Richland County Treasurer's Office to ensure the safety of county funds and make certain the proper information is available for our decision-makers.

We have done all of these things while increasing investment returns by 400% in two years. We have overhauled our customer services to be more accurate and available to our taxpayers. We've audited our own books to find tax cheaters. We are increasing the enforcement of delinquent taxes, and at the same time, reducing the number of people who have their property sold at tax sale. We provide more options to pay a tax bill than ever before for our citizen's convenience. And, we have reduced the time you stand in line by shortening transactions.

Our improvements have given us increasing credibility in dealing with the public we serve. Those are things that haven't made the headlines.

There are things we do well and things that we can do better. I believe that it is my task to always improve. Whether it is customer service, taxpayer convenience, or maintaining the Treasury's books, we have improved a great deal and will continue to do so.

The Richland County Treasurer's Office was mistakenly blamed for all of the errors in the 2003-2004 Audit report by The State's story. Our office was a footnote to the problems identified by the external auditor - we fixed the two items for which we were responsible ... a year ago.

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