

By: Helen Barrett
Alva Review
Sunday Aug 29th, 2004

“Since we hired Visual Lease Services (VLS) in August 2001, we’ve seen some big results,” Woods County Assessor Monica Schmidt said.

“Due to the unreported and undervalued property, we have picked up \$1.8 million in taxes solely due to our hiring them,” Schmidt said.

During the past three years VLS found 49 companies who had never been on the tax rolls of Woods County.

“We’ve collected almost a half million dollars in omitted tax money,” Schmidt said. “That included endless miles of omitted pipeline, compressors and equipment as well as gas in storage.”

With VLS operating in 27 Oklahoma counties and two in Kansas, they are able to hook the counties together via a data base making pipeline and property easier to find.

“They have driven every square mile of our county. On the places you can’t do that, they’ve driven on lease roads, cow paths, GPS’d any equipment out there,” Schmidt said.

“Whether locally or centrally assessed or taken care of through gross production (taxes), they entered into an extensive database and mapping system, then they connect all the dots.

“That’s how they discover all the pipelines.”

Woods county didn’t have the expertise, the knowledge, or the money to purchase the technological equipment necessary for the project.

“All of the schools in Woods County benefited greatly from this,” Schmidt said.

The schools had been in a financial crunch the last few years before they cooperated with the county in hiring VLS, Schmidt said. The county’s budget outlook dimmed as well.

“This has solely kept us afloat,” Schmidt stated. “We’d have been in a heck of a mess without it.”

The \$1.8 million is a collective increase over the three-year period. Finding the un-remitted properties will insure a continued added tax base because of the value of the property will be maintained.

“We have to keep on them because continually we have new pipelines added,” she said.

The only protests still unresolved involve gas in storage.

“When all that gets resolved, that will take care of those issues, too,” Schmidt said.

Those protests are currently in the courts.

“Had it not been for gas in storage, we would not have had any protests at all this year,” Schmidt said.

In addressing persistent rumors, Schmidt said this project had not thwarted drilling in Woods, County.

“Those companies pass on their cost,” She said. “They’re not going to leave.”

The omitted taxes collected has paid for the cost of VLS contracts nine time over, the assessor said.

“Its not that we weren’t doing our job before, but we had no way to do all of this,” she said.

Since the assessor relies on companies to submit their own value, there was \$45.6 million in market value omitted from the rolls.

“I believe everyone should pay their fair share whether a big company or an individual,” Schmidt said. “In turn, it keeps the value up there and even for all the taxpayers. The burden doesn’t come back on individual taxpayers.