

Russo admits that his staff has political ties, but says they serve the public

Posted by [Joseph L. Wagner](#) June 27, 2008



Russo inspection sticker

His staff may have many political ties, but Cuyahoga County Auditor Frank Russo says his workers are there to serve the public.

The auditor said that he considers the ties that he, a political colleague or a friend may have with a job applicant. But the deciding factor for hiring is the person's devotion to serving the public, he said.

The auditor's office appraises 534,000 property parcels and sets tax rates for 127 governments, school boards and agencies in the county. The office bills \$1.2 billion in taxes, which is then collected by the county treasurer.

Auditor employees make sure that the gas pumps and butcher scales in most communities in the county are accurate, sell dog licenses, monitor tax abatements and chase hotels and motels to make sure the businesses pass along room taxes to the county.

During Russo's 11 years as auditor, the office:

Has continually been awarded the Government Finance Association Award for excellence.

Started a hotel-motel tax auditing system that Russo says has boosted room tax collections from \$9.2 million in 1996 to almost \$14 million last year.

Became among the first in the state to take a property tax reappraisal "road show" into the community. In what are known as table-top revisions, department representatives meet homeowners in convenient locations to hear challenges to valuations.

Russo and County Engineer Robert Klaiber Jr. are about to unveil a sophisticated online property parcel identification system that will use photographs instead of line drawings. The system will consolidate all public information related to a property -- including sexual predators who live nearby -- into a one-stop site.

© 2008 The Plain Dealer
© 2008 cleveland.com All Rights Reserved