

TDA Bulletin

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Joe G. Tedder, CFC, Tax Collector

Polk County, Florida



The Tax Collector's Tourist Development Academy:

The Academy is an education arm of the Polk County Tax Collector's Office. The Academy consists of tri-annual series of informational programs focusing on current regulatory and compliance issues that most affect visitor accommodation rental businesses.

TDA Mission:

To advise, educate and inform providers of accommodations in Polk County

Polk County Tax Collector's Office

Joe G. Tedder, CFC
Tax Collector

- ▷ Artis Dukes, CFCA
Director
Economic Development
Department
863-534-4746 x5712
ArtisDukes@PolkTaxes.com
- ▷ Martha Roe Burke
Director
Compliance & Taxpayer Affairs
Department
863-534-4722
MarthaRoeBurke@PolkTaxes.com

TDA ANNOUNCES DISTINGUISHED SEAL OF COMPLIANCE BUSINESSES FOR 2007

BARTOW - The TDA recently awarded nine property management companies the Seal of Compliance designation for this year. In addition to the 5 charter members who were inducted last July, four new firms have joined the prestigious ranks. The firms awarded for 2007 are:



- ◆ CJ Management, LLC
- ◆ Hayes Vacation Home Rentals
- ◆ Liberty Vacation Homes
- ◆ Premier Home Management
- ◆ Sovereign Vacation Villas
- ◆ J & M Management Services, Inc. (Sunsplash)
- ◆ Personalized Property Management Service
- ◆ Florida Finesse Property & Management, Inc.
- ◆ Villa4uFlorida

The **SEAL OF COMPLIANCE (SOC)** is a designation earned by management companies that represent one or more tourist development

tax accounts on file with the Polk County Tax Collector's Office and who have met or exceeded the industry specific criteria established relating to local tax compliance. Participation in the program is voluntary.

SOC recipients receive a Letter of Commendation, a Certificate of Award, table tents for display in rental units, and a listing on the Tax Collector's website, among other benefits.

To learn more about the **SEAL OF COMPLIANCE**, including requirements and benefits, check out the **Program Guidelines** by going to the Tax Collector's website,

www.polktaxes.com

and clicking on the Tourist Development Academy link or by calling the Tax Collectors' Office.

POLK OUTPOST 27 HOSTS TDA SPRING SEMINAR

The Polk County Tax Collector's Office held their annual Tourist Development Academy's **Spring Seminar** on Wednesday, April 25, 2007, at the newly-opened Polk Outpost 27 in Davenport.

The Tourist Development Academy, an educational arm of the Tax Collector's Office, hosts educational events during the year to update and inform the owners and managers of the short term rental market.

Representatives from county and state agencies were on hand to provide current regulatory information to the attendees, representing approximately 25 property management companies doing business in Polk County.

Participants were presented with a **Vacation Home Owners Guide**, a collaborative effort between the CFPMA and the Polk County Tax Collector's Office. An electronic version is downloadable at the Tax Collector's website, www.polktaxes.com. New Seal of Compliance holders for 2007 were also recognized.

This year's event coincided with an Open House hosted by the Tourism and Marketing Department of the Polk County Board of County Commissioners in conjunction with the Central Florida Property Managers Association. The program was televised by PGTV during their regular programming on *Dateline Polk*.

"The short-term rental industry makes up over 50 percent of the Polk tourism tax money. As lodging providers, your business plays an important role in Central Florida's economic engine. Working with you, we recognize the contributions of the short-term rental industry to Polk County's growth."

Joe G. Tedder

Upcoming Deadlines:

- ▶ 2006 Property Tax
Deadline is May 30, 2007
- ▶ Business Tax Receipts, (formerly Occupational Tax for Businesses) must be renewed, beginning August 1st through September 30th of each year.
- ▶ Tourist Development Taxes are due on the 1st and delinquent on the 20th of each month. Make your payment early to avoid penalty.

Sea of Orange Stickers



You may have seen a rash of orange stickers on a number of rental properties recently. Our Field Deputies are working hard to post delinquent tangible personal property taxes notices and other *tax due notices*.

Yvonne's Closes Its' Doors

FOUR CORNERS – According to local reports, a vacation property management company that closed following allegations it defrauded its clients has been ordered to pay at least \$75,000 to three of the homeowners it once did business with.

Minneola lawyer Edward P. Jordan II has won judgments in Circuit Court in Bartow for three former clients of Yvonne's Property Management Inc., which closed its office on Waverly Barn Road in August. Prior to that time, the Polk County Tax Collector's Office had been contacted by homeowners who suspected Yvonne's of illegal conduct.

The Tax Office's internal audits were turned

over to the Polk County Sheriff's Office for suspicion of fraudulent conduct relating to filing of tourist tax collections.

Jordan had filed breach of contract lawsuits on behalf of Ben Gilbert, Raymond Gillanders and John Clark, all British residents who own vacation homes in the Polk County portion of Four Corners and had hired Yvonne's to manage those homes for them.

The owners of Yvonne's, Walter and Yvonne Bernstein, did not show up in court for any of the three hearings and three separate judges found in favor of the homeowners, issuing final judgments by default.

Homeowners seeking more information on this should contact the Polk County Sheriff's Office by calling (863) 534-6299.

Tax Collector's Message

Remember... Our office takes the issue of delinquent tourist development taxes very seriously. Everyone is required to collect and remit taxes monthly. If you know of any short-term renting that is not covered by a tourist development tax account and/or county local business tax receipt (previously referred to as an occupational license), please contact our office.

1-866-OUR-TURN (1-866-687-8876)



SPOTLIGHT on... Mike Eckersley

J & M Management Services of Davenport, Florida is an "old-timer" in a very new and emerging industry in Central Florida and Polk County, vacation home management.

Mike Eckersley and his partner of 17 years, Jason Blackburn, the 'J' and 'M' of Management Services, are both English countrymen who moved to Central Florida in 1989 specifically to set up a property management services company. A friend of Eckersley had already been here in Florida previously selling real estate to friends back home in the U.K. as rental vacation homes.

Mike's career background is in hotel management in the United Kingdom, where he was previously employed as the General Manager of Chesford Grange Hotel, Kenilworth in Warwickshire, England before moving across the pond. "It wasn't much of a transition," Mike shared, "as maintenance is the same for both. In each, you are the servant of both guests and property owners."

Eckersley is quick to point out that his partner Blackburn is the main stay of the company, handling the maintenance and housekeeping of the homes they manage as well as the staffing required. Michael looks after all the accounting and office functions together with the advertising and rental components. J & M operates as a small business with a compact staff and contractors, many of whom have been with the

company over ten years. J & M does not own any of the managed homes outright, choosing rather to deal primarily with financial investors in the vacation home industry.

Eckersley invests his time and energy not only in his business but also in the short-term rental industry. A charter member of the Central Florida Property Managers' Association for ten years, Mike is also a faithful contributor to the Tax Collector's Tourist Development Academy events and Task Force. J & M Management Services is also the first and charter member of the Tourist Development Academy's Seal of Compliance.

Managing vacation homes takes a lot of focus and hard work. Ideally, Eckersley's goal is for rental income to cover the costs of the home. "The goal," Eckersley pointed out, "is to bank on the investment increase of the property over time."

J & M works with homeowners to fix each property's rental rate at a price that will keep the maximum occupancy. "Prior to 911, it was not difficult to achieve 75% occupancy," Eckersley noted. "However with the vast increase in the number of rental properties, that rate has declined substantially."

With over 80 properties under their management, we asked Mike what he saw over the horizon for the fledgling industry.

"To receive the recognition that we are now getting as an industry, along with the ten years of cooperation through the CFPMA and through local government, there is no reason why this industry will not continue to grow. The best kept secret of Central Florida is becoming more widespread than ever before."