



County of San Bernardino



Ensen Mason CPA, CFA • Auditor-Controller/Treasurer/Tax Collector

# DOLLARS & SENSE

## ATC Quarterly Newsletter

Third Quarter, 2019

July—August—September 2019

### THE TECHNOLOGY CRISIS WE MUST ADDRESS NOW by Ensen Mason

In the late 1980's cell phones weighed over two pounds, cost many thousands of dollars, had very poor coverage and were possible to own only if you were very rich. Facebook and other forms of social media didn't exist and AOL email was cutting edge computer technology. Ronald Reagan was President of the United States and the Soviet Union was America's main competition on the world stage. Here in San Bernardino County, the predecessor to the Auditor-Controller/Treasurer/Tax Collector's (ATC) office, the Assessor's office and the Internal Services Department proudly introduced the Tax Roll System (TROL) and the Property Information System (PI) to the county taxation infrastructure.

By 2019, technology has turned cell phones into supercomputers owned by just about everyone over the age of ten, social media has made information available instantaneously in real time (President Trump has 45 million followers on Twitter) and GIS systems allow you to see detailed tax information on every piece of real estate in San Bernardino County with just a few clicks of the mouse. But like zombies rising from the taxation technology graveyard, TROL and PI still lumber into patchwork operation twice a year to assess, apportion, collect and distribute over \$3.4 billion to hundreds of taxing agencies throughout San Bernardino County. San Bernardino County formally declared these systems obsolete in 2004 (*fifteen years ago!*) and an RFP to replace them was issued in 2005. The RFP was never followed up on and ATC, the Assessor and ISD have patched these systems together every six months since then, hoping to stave off disaster to another year.

The patchwork gets more extensive every year and the odds of a breakdown are now quite high. Somebody has to blow the whistle and insist that immediate action to replace these seriously outdated legacy systems be taken. **That somebody is me.** This will be the largest and most difficult task I have ever undertaken, but it has to be done to prevent a system breakdown that could devastate public services by stopping the flow of tax dollars to local government agencies throughout the County.

The good news is that I have personally met with CEO Gary McBride on this subject, and he understands and agrees that resolution of this crisis is imperative for the County. My estimate is that replacement of both these systems will take several years – if we start NOW! The first step is a new staff position to address complex planning issues that CEO McBride has approved and will go before the Board of Supervisors later this year. I have directed my staff to begin preparations for replacement and we have scheduled presentations in August from the leading national vendors on technology that will support our needs for decades to come.

This is my top priority in service to our taxpayers. I pledge to do everything in my power to see that San Bernardino County has the best and most user friendly taxation technology of any county in America.



### In This Issue

- Welcome Message
- In Our Community
- The First Six Months
- Fun Fact About Ensen Mason
- County Treasurer Update
- Book Club
- ATC Unveiling of Historical Photos
- Student Intern Program
- Coffee and Tea Program
- NACo Awards
- ATC Social Media
- Class of 2019 Graduates

### IN OUR COMMUNITY...

Mr. Mason participated in the following events in our Community:

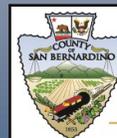
July 10—Public Outreach Radio Recording—*Tax Sale Re-Offer*

July 10—Historical Photos—1853-Current—*The Unveiling*

July 11 — Management Leadership Academy—*Welcome and Opening Remarks at ATC*

July 12—Speaking at Lincoln Club of San Bernardino County

July 16 — Intern Welcome



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SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

# THE FIRST SIX MONTHS

Following his successful and well attended swearing in ceremony on January 7, 2019, new ATC Ensen Mason embarked on an ambitious program to transform the way the Department communicates with the public and to actively promote transparency in ATC operations.

- Mr. Mason published the first ever Annual Report on Fraud, Waste and Abuse, highlighting each of the 86 cases referred by members of the public during 2018 to our Fraud, Waste and Abuse Hotline and informing the public about how these cases were resolved.
- He expanded the use of social media and greatly increased the amount of content on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. He also established the first ever ATC Yelp account. Social media icons were added to property tax bills and inserts, SAP Newsletter, SAP correspondence, ATC websites and posters.
- Mr. Mason is now the voice of the Department. When the public calls in to any of our five lines, his voice greets them and guides them to the appropriate services within our Department.
- A privacy policy was added to our website to ensure privacy and security to members of the public interacting with us through the Internet.
- All Comment Cards on our service from the public, good and bad, are personally reviewed by Mr. Mason and every one of them is responded to by appropriate Department staff.
- Mr. Mason personally participated in receiving tax payments from the public during the property tax installment period ending April 10, both in the High Desert temporary location and in the ATC building in San Bernardino. He enjoyed interacting with taxpayers and they were appreciative of actually being served personally by their elected tax official.
- Initiated the Department's first ever quarterly newsletter (this one), with information from our ATC and from our employees. Mr. Mason believes communication is the key to success in teamwork.
- Created a basic brochure putting each of our nine divisions and the ATC himself before the public in an eye-catching, easy to read and understand summary format.
- Participated in several Meet and Greets with staff where the dialogue is open communication in a friendly, comfortable atmosphere.
- Attended his first State of the County event along with other county leaders, attended his first SBCERA meeting and conference, attended CACTTC Legislative Day in Sacramento and their annual conference, and attended the National GFOA conference.
- Mr. Mason has also spoken before many public groups including the Association of Government Accountants, West End Real Estate Group, California Joint Audit Managers' Committee, the Inland Empire Conservative Republicans of California and the San Bernardino County Lincoln Club.
- Phase One of the Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping collaboration application between Property Tax and Information Technology Divisions went live in early July and provides taxpayers with detailed information on their properties.
- Completed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Door Enhancement Project for compliance at both public and employee entrance doors.
- ATC earned three National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Awards for it's Cashiering System, Remittance System and the Property Tax Refund Enhancement Project.
- Mr. Mason met with Chris Gardner, award winning author of The Pursuit of Happyness, and discussed motivational techniques. Mr. Gardner's book was made into a major motion picture of the same name starring Will Smith.
- Mr. Mason is requiring the largest corporate taxpayers who make aggregate tax payments to the County of \$50,000 or more in a calendar year to submit their payment by ACH credit or wire transfer. This will enable our office to more effectively process payments, provide more timely proof of transactions, and allow for quicker allocation of funds to local jurisdictions who rely upon them.

## **Fun Fact About ENSEN MASON**

### **How'd You Get Your Name?**

My father was an enlisted man in the United States Army serving during the Vietnam War. The name came from my Dad's aspiration for me — to be a field goal kicker. Many field goal kickers of the time had Army and Navy names, so he thought he would get me started with the right name. Ensign is the initial rank for officers in the Navy. My grandmother recorded the birth certificate on behalf of my Dad, and she was a bad speller...

### **COUNTY TREASURER UPDATE**

Last year, the San Bernardino County Treasury Staff spearheaded the effort to write and pass Assembly Bill 1770. The staff worked closely with former State Assemblyman Marc Steinorth, who authored the bill, and the California Association of County Treasurers and Tax Collectors (CACTTC), the bill sponsor. AB 1770 became law effective January 1, 2019.

The new law revised California government code language relating to local agency purchases of asset-backed securities (ABS) and benefits all California municipalities.

The change in law has allowed the County to add high quality AAA-rated ABS programs to the mix of other highly rated pool investments, resulting in higher income for pool participants.

The County Treasury staff employs sound strategic money management practices, protecting taxpayer dollars in its care by following its statutory mandates of Safety, Liquidity, and Yield.

The Treasury estimates that it will apportion over \$110 million of investment pool earnings this year, which serves to fund public services and K-14 education in San Bernardino County.

The San Bernardino County Treasury Pool is rated AAA/S1 by Fitch Ratings Agency. AAA and S1 are the highest credit quality and market stability ratings assigned by Fitch for local government investment pools.

### **BOOK CLUB Recommended Read by ENSEN MASON**

My book selection this quarter is The Worldly Philosophers by Robert Heilbroner. The most well-known economic thinkers are evaluated with the historical context in which they lived. Many of us forget or never knew that capitalism is only a few hundred years old. Economic writers as diverse as Karl Mark, Adam Smith and John Maynard Keynes are evaluated and contrasted. Anybody with an interest in history or economics would enjoy this book.

To check out a copy, please see ATC Librarian Tracy Calentti.

## ATC Unveiling of Historical Portraits



On July 10, 2019, ATC Ensen Mason and former ATC/County Supervisor Larry Walker unveiled portraits of the fifty three men and women who have served in some form of this position since formation of San Bernardino County in 1853. Over 150 employees and members of the public were present at the unveiling. Mr. Walker commended ATC Mason and expressed his appreciation for the ATC history project and the wall of portraits.

The portraits line the first floor hallway of the ATC Building at 268 Hospitality Lane in San Bernardino and the public is welcome to view them anytime during our normal business hours of 8 AM to 5 PM Monday through Friday.

### STUDENT INTERN PROGRAM

ATC has 13 new interns and 2 returning interns as part of the 10 week summer intern program that runs June 24<sup>th</sup>- August 30<sup>th</sup>.

The Intern Program for the Auditor-Controller/Treasurer/Tax Collector's office is open to students in the Spring at both local and public Universities; Cal State San Bernardino, University of Riverside and Cal Poly Pomona. Each University has its own process to accept applications for our Intern Program and students are encouraged to inquire with their career center or intern coordinator for details.

Welcome all interns! We are very excited to share all that ATC has to offer.

### FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA:



**The ATC Coffee and Tea Program is off to a great start. ATC Ensen Mason has personally paid for over 7,000 coffee k-cups and over 1,400 tea k-cups totaling over \$5,000 for staff since January. The photo above is our Central Collections staff thanking Mr. Mason!**



### NACo Award Winners

ATC has been recognized with three Achievement Awards in the information technology category from the National Association of Counties (NACo). The awards honor innovative, effective county government programs that strengthen services for residents.

NACo recognized ATC for its Cashiering System, Remittance System, and PIRFNET Enhancement Project, as customized by the Information Technology, Tax Collector, and Property Tax Divisions to support and enhance existing business processes in each division.

# Congratulations Class of 2019!!!



This year ATC Mason is celebrating his son Travis' graduation from Orangewood High School in Redlands. Travis Mason received the Presidential Award for outstanding academic achievement and the Avid sash and medal. He is one of only two students to have a GPA higher than 3.33. Additionally, he is one of only three in his graduating class accepted to a four year University. Travis will be attending University of Redlands in the fall where he also received a scholarship. ATC Mason is quite the PROUD Dad!

Top left photo — Three generations of Masons celebrate Travis Mason's graduation. Flanking Travis from left to right is Father Ensen and Grandfather Thomas.



ATC's own Daisy Gonzales graduated from University of LaVerne with her Master's in Health Administration. Daisy works as Fiscal Specialist in Tax Accounting.



Karina Gray graduated from Glendora High School and will be attending Azusa Pacific University. Karina is a member of the National Honor Society, ranked 23rd out of 590 among graduating students and completed her senior year with a 4.63 GPA! Karina is Assistant ATC Doug Boyd's granddaughter.



Sean Catalon graduated from Redlands High School and will attend Riverside City College. Sean is Marlyn Catalon's son. Marlyn is a Supervising Accountant III in the Controller Division.



Emmanuel Nathan Alexander Tanopo graduated from California State University, San Bernardino. He is Maria Espinas' son. Maria is a Collection's Officer in Central Collections Division.



Ernie Abreo graduated from Wilmer Amina Carter High School. He is Anita Valdez's grandson. Anita is an Office Assistant III in Payroll.



Samantha Nieto promoted from Kindergarten. She is Jesse Nieto's granddaughter. Jesse is a Collections Officer in the Central Collections Division.



Steven Chavez graduated from John A. Rowland High School. He is Anita Valdez's grandson. Anita is an Office Assistant III in Payroll.



Cassandra Santillano promoted from Norco Intermediate School and will be attending Norco High School. Cassandra is the daughter of Linda Santillano, the Division Chief of Property Tax Division.



Ava Sandavol graduated from Cherry Valley Brethren Pre School. Ava is Lisa Alvarez's granddaughter. Lisa is one of the Managers in Tax Collector Division.



Kalista Banales graduated from Wilmer Amina Carter High School in Rialto. Kalista is Karin Montano's daughter. Karin is a Collections Officer in Central Collections Division.



Erick Garcia III promoted from pre-school. Erick is Michelle Ortega's grandson. Michelle is an Office Assistant III in Central Collections.



Aaron J. Franco graduated from Grand Terrace High School and plans to pursue a career in Law Enforcement/Criminal Justice. Aaron is Norma Bejar's son. Norma is a Collections Officer in Central Collections Division.



From Left to Right—Mason Parra, Noah Parra and Makayla Parra—Mason is off to Kindergarten, Noah graduated from Grand Terrace High School and Makayla promoted from Terrace Hills Middle School. All three are Andrea Parra's kids. Andrea is the secretary for the Controller Division.



Madeline Noble promoted from St. Adelaides. This is Wendy Ridge's granddaughter. Wendy is an Office Assistant III in Payroll.