

"I thought Christmas had come early," Hill said. The holiday spirit was short lived. After questioning the assessments on the phone, Hill was told a mistake was made. He was mailed a new reassessment notice that left him dismayed.



For more on Oconee's reassessment, see page A4.

The larger of his two properties with more than 2,000 square feet that includes two bathrooms was appraised

at \$80.56 per square foot. However, a smaller adjoining property with less than 1,400 square feet, no bathrooms and fewer frills was appraised higher at almost \$123 per square foot.

Hill did a little digging on his own and found that appraisals per square foot on five other parcels at the same commercial center were all over the place.

"There's no rhyme or reason," Hill said.

Ann Smith had an appointment Wednesday to see a Tyler representative concerning her reassessment.

The lake Keowee retiree could not believe that the land value of her property had increased to \$258,000, a jump of more than 100 percent since 2001 when the taxable land value was assessed at \$125,000.

The dramatic increase in Smith's land value does not square with South Carolina's 2006 tax reform that capped at 15 percent the amount a property could increase in value during reassessment.

Forrest Moore called The Journal to complain about his new assessments. He has a hard time dealing with the philosophical question of how Tyler can justify raising values during a period of prolonged economic downturn coupled with a depressed housing market.

Blackstone said he can't make sense of it either.

"Foreclosures are driving prices down, banks are taking less on short sales and (Tyler) raised assessments," he said.

# 'No rhyme nor reason'

## Criticism mounts against Oconee reassessment

WALHALLA — Devoe Blackstone has made a living from real estate and knows a thing or two about property values.

This week he's been going through a stack of tax bills that arrived in the mail in recent days on properties he owns.

Between looking at the tax bills and comparing them with reassessment notices, Blackstone has spent quite a bit of time scratching his head.

The numbers don't make sense to the former mayor of Seneca. He puts the blame squarely on Tyler Technologies Inc., the private company that Oconee County paid \$1.8 million to do a county-wide reassessment of property values.

Blackstone said Wednesday at his real estate office that county officials wasted taxpayers' money on hiring Tyler.

"They've appraised some properties at the cap that you can't sell at the previous appraisal value," he said. "It doesn't make sense. I think reassessment was a waste of money."

It's understandable that Blackstone bristles at the contract awarded Tyler by Oconee officials given that Pickens County, which is larger and has more properties than Oconee to be appraised, completed its reassessment in-house at a cost of less than \$25,000 to taxpayers.

Blackstone is preparing his paperwork to appeal Tyler's appraisals.

Bob Hill, another real estate professional in town, is getting ready to appeal his appraisal as well.

Hill said Wednesday that he initially checked his reassessment using a county online tool. His eyes lit up when the appraisals on his two commercial properties on

the U.S. 123 Bypass came in lower than they've ever been.