Taxpayers swamp Treasurer's Office in Walhalla

Rush is on to make payments to deduct them on 2009 returns

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WALHALLA — Oconee County taxpayers are rushing to make their payments before New Year's Eve on Thursday.

Scores of residents dashed to the Oconee County Treasurer's Office at the Government Administration Building in Walhalla on Tuesday.

By paying their taxes on or before Dec. 31, taxpayers who itemize their deductions will be able to write off the payments in their 2009 Income Tax Return.

Treasurer Greg Nowell said the crowds coming in to make their payments appear larger than in previous years.

"We've been busy all day," he said.

Nowell said he expects the rush to continue today and through New Year's Eve.

In the past, Nowell has kept his employees past 5 p.m. on New Year's Eve to make sure that payments are posted in the computer. Taxes cannot be deducted for 2009 unless the receipt is posted by Dec. 31.

Nowell attributes the larger crowds to the shortening of the tax-paying season from four to two months because of delays.

Normally, notices start going out in mid-September, but this year residents did not receive their tax bills until late in November. The delay was caused in part to technical problems in converting the County Assessor's computer software system to the County Auditor and Treasurer's system.



CARLOS GALARZA | STAFF

Residents line up in the hallway outside the Oconee County Treasurer's Office in Walhalla on Tuesday. Treasurer Greg Nowell said his staff was busy all day as people rushed to pay their taxes before Dec. 31 so they can deduct payments on their 2009 income tax returns.

Nowell said the county is lagging behind last year's tax collections.

Nowell said that as of last week, his office had collected $11 million in taxes, or roughly half of the $20 million collected during the same period in 2008. However, he expects to make up the shortfall in the coming weeks.

The deadline for paying taxes without penalty is Jan. 15. Nowell said his office is usually swamped before the Jan. 15 deadline as well.

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