

Colton Assessments

To The Editor:

I must comment on Susan Mende's Feb. 20 article entitled "Colton Taxes Too Low" that is based on misinformation supplied by Property Appraiser Robert Hostetter and St. Lawrence County Real Property Director Jane Powers. This article alleges that property owners in the town of Colton are paying low taxes at the expense of other St. Lawrence County towns, especially Pierrepont property owners who are in the Colton-Pierrepont School district.

I find it absolutely amazing that someone in the property-appraising business apparently has not heard of the equalization rate process. Simply stated, the equalization rate process equalizes the tax rate based on at what percentage property in a municipality is assessed. The result is that the tax rates in towns like Colton, who have low equalization rates have a higher tax rate. Thus the county tax rate for Colton property owners this past year was \$190 per thousand dollars of assessment while Pierrepont people paid only \$8.28 per thousand dollars of assessment. As for the school tax, the rate for Colton was \$294.99 while Pierrepont was \$12.85 per thousand dollars of assessment.

I do not know the requirements to become a New York State-certified appraiser, but I would think that anyone in that business would be aware of the equalization process.

Now, as for Mrs. Powers. The equalization rate process is the guts of real property assessing. If anyone in St. Lawrence County understands the equalization process it should be and is her. It is the process that makes us all equal. Hello!!

When questioned by the press about Mr. Hostetter's claims, it was her ethical and moral duty to step up to the plate and inform the news media of the error in Mr. Hostetter's theory. Instead, she took that opportunity to further her own personal agenda and longtime ambition to:

- 1: Get all towns at 100 percent assessment as demonstrated by her pursuit of countywide assessment.

- 2: Get rid of all elected assessors and replace them with sole appointed assessors taking away the voters' right to choose.

- 3: Then to get rid of those assessors and go to county assessing and to accept New York State's values for utilities and taxable state land and the towns be damned.

She suggests that Colton residential owners are under-assessed and that the utilities and New York State forest lands are overassessed. State land and utilities make up about 70 percent of Colton's tax base and 30 percent is residential, private forest, and commercial. You don't have to have a degree in mathematics to figure out that by raising 30 percent of the town and lowering 70 percent of the town, you could end up with a lower total assessment and you are not going to do much to help Pierrepont and other St. Lawrence County towns.

Another thing I found bizarre was that when the press questioned the Colton assessor chairman, Mr. McNamara, his response was "Duh, no comment. Talk to the supervisor." He should have responded and squelched all the misinformation, but he, too, follows Mrs. Powers' agenda.

Richard Owens
Former Colton assessor
chairman for 22 years