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Levy County delinquent tax list advertisement is published

By Jeff M. Hardison © May 12, 2017 at 12:07 a.m.

LEVY COUNTY – As promised, Levy County Tax Collector Linda Fugate provided the link to her office’s website so that a display ad on all seven pages of *HardisonInk.com* could be used to attract more buyers.

“I am very happy to see this ad at work,” *HardisonInk.com* owner Jeff M. Hardison said. “I clicked on the ad and went to the site. Once there, I could click on various underlined words and find everything I needed.”

The publisher said he hopes this set of ads, one on each of the seven pages, brings in at least one extra buyer who purchases \$150 worth of delinquent property tax certificates (the cost of the ad on seven pages for three weeks).

“My first plan was to create an extra webpage on the *HardisonInk.com* site,” Hardison said. “Thanks to Tax Collector Fugate, I found a much more efficient method.”

Hardison said there is a monopoly on qualified newsprint bidders for this advertisement. Only one bidder existed for this job this year in this county. And that newspaper is not 100 percent local.

The *Chiefland Citizen* is part of the chain owned by Florida Newspapers LLC (whose sole stockholder is Landmark Community Newspapers LLC of Shelbyville, Kentucky). The newspaper is published in Citrus County and is shipped to Levy County via trucks from one of the daily newspapers in that county.

Jeff Hardison sole proprietor of *HardisonInk.com*, a Florida native, and a Levy County resident and taxpayer, submitted an offer to publish only the delinquent tax list and then to have a link instead to the Levy County Tax Collector's website.

HardisonInk.com is a 7-year-old daily news website that serves North Central Florida, and beyond. It has averaged in excess of one million hits a month for the past two years, and has had an average of 16,000 unique visitors each month in 2017.

Hardison is a multiple award-winning writer and editor who served as a reporter, business writer, bureau chief, managing editor, editor and executive editor for Florida weekly and daily newspapers.

He graduated from the University of Florida’s College of Journalism and Communications in 1984.

He earned his first investigative reporting award from the Florida Press Association in 1983 when he wrote a series of stories, which revealed a Hamilton County commissioner had used public funds for private gain.

His most recent FPA award for investigative reporting was in 2007 after he wrote a series of stories about alleged voter fraud in Chiefland city elections.

Between those two points, the FPA honored him for winning in the following other classifications: Best Full Use of Color; Environmental or Conservation; Community Service; and Front Page Layout.

The Florida Press Club honored him for his work when it awarded him in the category of Best Public Service.

Hardison also taught children and adults (including teachers) English, English for Speakers of Other Languages and journalists for five years after taking post-graduate classes at the University of South Florida



CLICK HERE

To See The
**LEVY COUNTY
DELINQUENT TAX
CERTIFICATES**

**THIS LINK
CONNECTS
TO THE
LEVY COUNTY
TAX COLLECTOR'S
WEBSITE**

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and Manatee Community College.

He taught at Eckerd College (St. Petersburg); Lemon Bay High School (Englewood); the New World Language Institute (Bradenton); and Admiral Farragut Academy (St. Petersburg).

He began his writing career in high school at Northeast High School in St. Petersburg, where he was an editorial writer; editorial editor; and poetry editor of the Literary Edition of the Nor'easter.

Hardison completed a newswriting and editing course at Modern Media Institute (now known as Poynter Institute for Media Studies) in the summer of 1977, before returning to St. Petersburg Jr. College, where he was the news editor for The Wooden Horse – before transferring to U.F.

While at U.F., he was a stringer for The Independent Florida Alligator, the High Springs Herald and other publications.

After college, Hardison worked at daily and weekly newspapers in the following Florida counties: Hamilton, Madison, Suwannee, Lafayette, Collier, Pinellas, Indian River, Brevard, Sumter, Glades, Hendry, Okeechobee, Highlands, Charlotte, Sarasota, Lee, Levy, Columbia, Dixie and Gilchrist.

His stories, photos and videos continue influencing public policymakers as well as keeping readers, viewers and listeners informed, educated and entertained about the events and people in North Central Florida and beyond.

“I have enjoyed writing stories that were part of bringing about positive change,” he said. “One of my favorite series was when Bob Butterworth was the attorney general of Florida. I covered Fisheating Creek first and best. I was the first journalist to ride in a canoe from the headwaters through land on either side owned by Lykes Brothers Corp. And we camped on the banks one night on property owned by a person friendly to the mission of proving sovereign property rights for the people of Florida.”

Now as the owner and publisher of a daily news website, Hardison sees a method to offer the opportunity for more people to invest in Levy County via the delinquent property tax procedure.

“I don't own an offset web press,” Hardison said after the meeting. “I don't see that as being the thing to buy nowadays, even if the Florida Legislature thinks there is some great need to hang on to that tradition.

“There can be a method to let every person see the list on a government website by people who use the public libraries,” Hardison added. “This subsidizing of paper-based media by the government paying to buy ads to list delinquent taxpayers is not required logistically to make that information available to the people, although the Florida Statutes still require it.”

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## **Investing in delinquent tax certificates is a relatively safe bet**

**By Jeff M. Hardison**

**First Published March 1, 2017**

**BRONSON** – There is some degree of risk with investing money into anything.

Buying delinquent tax certificates is a relatively safe investment, and it can yield between 5 and 18 percent interest, depending on the winning bid.

Property taxpayers in all 67 counties are given opportunities to pay their ad valorem property taxes and save a certain percentage.

Even beyond the chance for that practice, when a property owner fails to pay their taxes on time, there is a chance to pay late taxes. And there are investors who can see a profit from buying delinquent tax certificates.

A recent discussion with Levy County Tax Collector Linda Fugate provided insight into delinquent tax certificates.

Property owners are given tax bills in November, Fugate said. There is a discount for real estate taxes paid before April 1. That discount drops as the time goes by from November until April 1.

The discount is 4 percent, then 3 percent, then 1 percent and for the person who waits until March to pay their property tax, there is a zero percent reduction.

All unpaid real estate taxes become delinquent on April 1 each year, with a 3 percent penalty added to the taxes.

In the month of May the delinquent taxes are advertised in the local newspaper once a week for three consecutive weeks before the tax certificate sale is held following the payment deadline.

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The dates for the weekly Chiefland Citizen to run the delinquent property tax list are May 11, 18 and 25.

The advertising cost and associated tax sale fees are added to the amount of the tax bill due during this time.

On or before June 1, Tax Collector Fugate, and the other 66 county tax collectors in Florida must hold a tax certificate sale, to auction off tax sale certificates.

A delinquent tax certificate is a lien on property created by payment of the delinquent taxes due.

It is not a purchase of property. And, Fugate added, the person who holds the certificate has no special privilege if it comes to the point where that property is sold on the courthouse steps, which is something that can happen later.

Back to the delinquent tax certificates, Florida Statutes require the tax collector to conduct a sale of tax certificates beginning on or before June 1 for the preceding year of delinquent real estate taxes.

The amount of the tax certificate is the sum of the unpaid real estate taxes and the non-ad valorem assessments, and the 3 percent penalty, and the advertising costs and the tax sale fees.

The county uses an Online Tax Sale process using proxy bids placed by its bidders.

Tax Sale bids can be input online starting the first day the advertising list is published in the newspaper.

Bidding continues until midnight of the night before the Tax Sale awarding (also known as the Tax Sale date).

On the day of the tax sale, the system awards the certificates to the lowest bidder.

Certificate bidding begins at an 18 percent interest rate and is bid down at one-quarter of 1 percent increments until the certificate is sold to the lowest bidder.

Fugate said a person could bid as low as one-quarter of 1 percent. However, the least amount that any bidder will make on the repayment of this delinquent tax certificate is 5 percent.

Tax certificates on land which has been granted a homestead exemption for the year in which the delinquent taxes were assessed and which have a face value of less than \$250 shall not be sold to the public at a tax certificate sale.

These certificates are issued to the county and shall bear Interest at 18% Interest per year.

Once the face value and accrued Interest exceed \$250, these certificates may be sold to an individual by the county.

Tax Certificates are kept as an electronic file within the Tax Collector's Office. A listing of certificates awarded and held is provided to each buyer after the tax sale.

Simple interest accrues on the certificate on a monthly basis (not daily), starting on June 1 for those certificates awarded to bidders during the tax sale process.

Interest is accrued at the rate of the winning bid.

When a tax certificate is redeemed (paid by the property owner), the certificate holder will receive the amount of his or her investment (certificate face amount) plus the interest accrued up to the date of redemption.

Fugate reminds possible bidders that if the tax certificate interest amount earned on the face amount is less than 5 percent, then a minimum of a 5 percent interest amount is paid to the holder of the redeemed (paid) certificate.

However, if a certificate is awarded at the tax sale as a 0 percent bid, it earns no interest and there is no 5 percent minimum interest amount paid to the certificate holder upon its redemption.

Tax Certificates are dated as of the first day of the tax certificate sale and expire after seven years.

Any tax certificate can be cancelled or reduced if errors, omissions, or double assessments are made.

Any certificate not sold during the tax sale, will be awarded and held by the county, as a County Certificate, accruing interest at 18 percent.

Individuals can purchase these County Held Certificates from the county by contacting the Tax Collectors Office.

If or when the property owner pays the delinquent taxes, the interest is calculated and a check is distributed to the certificate holder.

Certificate holders can file for a Tax Deed Application with the tax collector any time after two years have elapsed from the date of delinquency (April 1) for any unpaid certificates but no longer than seven years.

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This process starts the foreclosure of the property.

To foreclose the property, the certificate holder making application for a tax deed has to pay the Tax Collector an application fee, a title search fee and all amounts required for redemption or purchase of all other outstanding tax certificates, interest, omitted taxes, and delinquent taxes as well as applicable Clerk of Circuit Court fees, relating to the real estate.

In most cases, the property is scheduled to go to sale at public auction by the Clerk of Circuit Court within three to four months from the date of the tax deed application.

Fugate reminds prospective buyers that holding the certificate creates no advantage toward owning the property. The highest bidder becomes the owner of the property.

If the property is a non-homesteaded parcel, the opening bid is the amount of the taxes, accrued interest, plus costs and fees involved in a tax deed application. If it is a homesteaded property, the opening bid is half the assessed value plus the tax certificate face value and costs.

If the property does not sell, the tax certificate holder is required to take deed to the property.

**Information provided in this story is not intended for any purposes other than for a general understanding of the process.**

**For specific and the legal description of this process, refer to Chapter 197 of the Florida Statutes, and call the Levy County Tax Collector's Office for the finer points.**

**Also, as a general rule, always conduct thorough research before buying any real property.**