

Homestead Exemptions Reduce Tax Bills

Homeowners can reduce their property tax bills in 2013 by taking advantage of homestead exemptions offered by counties, cities, school district and other taxing entities. Application forms are available locally at the Gaines County Appraisal District office.

A homestead is generally the house and land used as the owner's principal residence on January 1 of the tax year. Homestead exemptions reduce the appraised value of your home and thus lower your property taxes.

Gayla Haridge said that in order to qualify for the residence homestead exemption. The person or persons claiming the exemption must own and reside in the property on January 1. And, the property must be the principal residence of an owner who qualifies for the exemption.

A mobile home owner can qualify for the homestead exemption by providing the appraisal district office with a copy of Statement of Ownership and Location issued by the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs and meets the homestead exemption qualifications.

Texas law provides several types of homestead exemptions for homeowners:

For School Tax purposes, there is a \$15,000 general homestead exemption to all homeowners and an additional \$10,000

exemption for those 65 or older or disabled.

The school tax exemption for those over 65 or disabled provides a special property tax "ceiling" for school taxes. While the market value of an elderly person's home may fluctuate with the market, the school taxes cannot increase above the tax amount in the first year that person qualifies for the over-65 exemption. The ceiling can increase, however, if the owner adds an improvement, other than normal maintenance or repair. When that happens, the new improvement is taxed at its current market value and the current tax rates. The new taxes are added to the previous tax ceiling to create a new ceiling.

Senior citizens may transfer their ceilings to a new home. The homeowners transfers the percentage of school tax paid on the former home, based on the last year the homeowner qualified that home for the over-65 tax ceiling, to the new home. The new tax ceiling is calculated to have the over-65 homeowner pay the same percentage of tax paid as on the former home. For example, if an over-65 homeowner currently has a school tax ceiling of \$100, but would pay \$400 without the ceiling, the percentage of tax paid is 25 percent. If the school taxes on the new home are \$1,000, the new tax ceiling would be \$250, or 25 percent of \$1,000.

The homeowner may request a certificate from the appraisal district where the former home was located that gives information about the tax ceiling. The homeowner gives this information to the appraisal district where the new home is located.

Homeowners 65 years of age or older don't need to own their homes on January 1 to qualify for the over-65 homestead exemption. New State law provides that they may apply as soon as they turn 65, own the home, and live in the home as their principal residence to receive the over-65 homestead exemptions. Homeowners 65 or older have up to one year from the date they turned 65 to file for their homestead exemption for that tax year. New laws also allow that if the over-65 spouse dies before applying for the over-65 exemption, the surviving spouse age 55 or older may apply for the over-65 exemption for the deceased spouse. The same filing deadlines apply.

If the over-65 homeowner dies, the surviving spouse may apply to keep the school tax ceiling, if the spouse was at least 55 years of age when the older spouse died.

The ceiling does not apply to taxes levied by the city or other taxing units.

Counties must offer a \$3,000 general homestead exemption on the portion of the county tax levied

for farm-to-market roads of flood control.

Any taxing unit's governing body may grant an additional optional exemption on the homesteads of disabled or elderly residents, or both. If the over-65 homeowner dies, the surviving spouse may apply to keep the over-65 exemptions if the surviving spouse is at least 55 years old at the time the spouse's death and owns and lives in the home.

Taxing units may also offer a local-option homestead exemption based on a percentage of a home's appraised value. In 2013, any taxing unit can exempt up to 20 percent of the value of each qualified homestead. No matter what percentage of the value the taxing unit adopts, the dollar amount of exemption for any home must equal at least \$5,000.

Partial disabled veteran exemptions: The law provides partial exemptions for any property owned by veterans who are disabled, spouses and survivors of deceased disabled veterans and spouses and survivors of military

personal who died on active duty. The amount of exemption is determined according to the percentage of service-connected disability.

100% Residence Homestead Exemption for Disabled Veterans: A disabled veteran who receives from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs 100 percent disability compensation due to a service-connected disability and a rating of 100 percent disabled or of individual un-employability is entitled to an exemption from taxation of the total appraised value of

the veteran's residence homestead. This benefit does not accrue to the surviving spouse upon the veteran's death.

For more information, homeowners may contact the Gaines County Appraisal District at 302 S. E. Avenue B, or (432) 758-3263 or contact the Comptroller's Property Tax Assistance Division at (800) 252-9121 ext 1, or visit the Comptroller's Web site at www.window.state.tx.us/taxinfo/proptax/.

Come and Catch Rain Knowledge with LEUWCD and Gaines Co. Extension

Grab your garden gear and come with your landscaping ideas! The Llano Estacado Underground Water Conservation District and Gaines County Agrilife Extension invites all interested in rain water harvesting or xeriscaping to attend a workshop scheduled March 18 starting at 6 p.m.

The workshop will cover step-by-step instructions on how to make your own rain barrel and will address the benefits of storing rain water for primarily outdoor usage. In addition to learning about rain water harvesting, the workshop will include information regarding xeriscaping, or which plants work well in dry, arid climates. An affiliate with Ector County Master Gardeners will present both topics.

LEUWCD Manager, Lori Bames, says hosting a rain water harvest workshop encourages awareness of the practice, which is not very common in Gaines County.

"The District hopes to use this workshop as an education tool. It's main purpose is to teach local residents the basics of rain water harvesting and give them information on which plants work best for West Texas gardens," Bames says.

The workshop will take place at the Gaines County Civic Center. Light refreshments will be served and door prizes will also be drawn for throughout the approximate two hour program. For more information regarding the program, contact the LEUWCD office at 432-758-1127 or call Amanda 432-758-4006 at the Gaines County Extension office. Come and catch some rain knowledge with us!

April 15 Deadline for '13 Property Renditions

Property tax renditions help you protest your rights as a taxpayer, Gayla Haridge,

Chief Appraiser said. A rendition is a report to the Appraisal District that lists all the taxable property you own or control on January 1, 2013. You may also give your opinion of the property's value, if you wish.

You must file a rendition if you own tangible personal property used to produce income - such as the machinery and equipment used by a business.

The appraisal district may require any taxpayer to file a rendition by sending the taxpayer a written notice and a rendition form.

You may want to file a rendition, even if you are not required to file, to preserve some of your right, as a taxpayer: You put your correct mailing address on record so your tax bills will go to the right address. If your bill is mailed to the wrong address, the law still holds you responsible for paying your taxes on time or paying extra charges for late payments. You can put

your own opinion of your property's value on record. If the appraisal district then places a higher value on your property, it must notify you in writing of the higher value and explain how you can protest that value to the Appraisal Review Board. By filing a special type of rendition called a report of decreased value, you can notify the appraisal district of significant damage to your property that occurred

in 2012. The district will send someone to verify the damage and take it into account when assigning a 2013 value to your property.

File renditions with the Gaines County Appraisal District at 302 S. E. Avenue B. Forms are available. The deadline for 2013 renditions is April 15th. For more information you can contact the Appraisal District Office at 758-3263.

Birth Announcements

Rodriguez

Johnathan and Janell Rodriguez of Seminole are the proud parents of a baby girl, Layla Ann Rodriguez.

The baby was born at Seminole Memorial Hospital on March 11, 2013. She weighed 7 lbs. 0.3 oz. and was 20.5" long.

Paternal grandparents are Margie and Francisco Rodriguez of Seminole.

Maternal grandparents are Dolores and Siria Rangel of San

Angelo.

Velasquez

María E. Velasquez of Seminole proudly announces the birth of her daughter, Juzal Manuela Velasquez.

The baby was born at Seminole Memorial Hospital on February 23, 2013. She weighed 9 lbs. 8.4 oz. and was 21" long.

Maternal grandparents are Elizabeth Loya and Vicente Velasquez of Seminole.

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