

Thomas County treasurer sees no end in sight

By Vera Sloan

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As the “keeper of the money” for Thomas County for the past 30 years, Donita Applebury says she still likes to come to work – most days.

Applebury, a Colby native, said she graduated from Colby High School in 1969. She graduated from the Licensed Practical Nurse program at Colby Community College two years later.

In September of 1980, she went to work for Lucille Taylor in the Thomas County Treasurer’s office, and said she learned everything about being county treasurer the right way, and from one of the best.

“Everything was done by hand then,” Applebury said. “Then when the county went to computers, Lucille didn’t want to have to learn computer, and encouraged me to try for the job.

“I was elected to the office in 1984 and took office in October of 1985. Other county offices take office in January, but the county treasurer is different because they have to wait until the tax abstract is finished, and that doesn’t happen until after the previous years taxes are paid and recorded, and the abstract is closed.”

Applebury said in the past tax statements had five copies, and went into the typewriter five times. Paper records filled a row of big filing cabinets, she said, and there was an elec-



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Even though County Treasurer Donita Applebury has been the keeper of the funds for Thomas County for 20 years, she’s still not ready to hang up her calculator.

tric numbering machine that numbered them all. If they paid half of their taxes, they got a hand-written receipt and if they paid them all, it was receipted and written down in the big township books – all 13 of them – and then when tax season was over, they hand wrote checks to all the taxing entities that got tax distributions, like fire districts, cemetery districts, cities, six school districts, and on and on.

The treasurer’s office is one of the busiest offices in the courthouse, and motor vehicle

registration is a lot of it, Applebury said.

“It used to be that families had one car, but in today’s family, it seems like every member of the family has a car. The money that goes to the state from motor vehicles has to be sent every day, along with a report of the business that was transacted the day before.

“Different sizes of trucks take different tags, and when they were doing it by hand, there were five people to do the work, and now that we’re computerized, it takes seven to do the work, and we’re all busy. We close at 4 p.m. every day to balance the accounts, and even when we did it by hand, it balanced to the penny.”

The way of doing the motor vehicle is changing again, Applebury said, so the treasurer’s office will be learning new things again, but the state is giving ample time from this September to next July to learn the changes.

Another change she said is online banking. There was a time when property and personal taxes were being paid, the office had a police escort to the bank. Now it’s done mostly on line, by computer.

The bank records still have to be checked every day, she said, because her office has to record it by hand in a bank book. She said her office is working on being able to take credit cards, and it’s not like it used to be when someone said they’d pay, they could be trusted to pay.

She says she loves doing what she’s doing, but there are times she wonders, “What will go wrong today.”

She said that she can stop a sale of real estate if taxes are owned to the county, because taxes are not a dischargeable debt.

She said she remembers a time when Nickerson Farms restaurant was having a sale, and she had to put out a statement that they couldn’t continue with the sale until the taxes were paid.

“The trustee said, ‘who do you think you are,’ but when I told him I was the county treasurer and there were taxes owed to Thomas County, he changed his tune,” she said. “I haven’t had to do that for a long time, because the taxes are paid out of the proceeds now.”

Another good thing, she noted, is the security button, and that when someone touches it – even accidentally – the police show up in a matter of seconds, and it’s a secure feeling.

Applebury says she’s not ready to think about retirement yet, because besides not being old enough to retire, she loves her job in spite of the changes that happen.

“I can stay as late as I want, and get things done with no pressure, because I enjoy doing what I do,” she said.

She said she remembers when she was in her early years of grade school, at a parent-teacher conference, one of the teachers told her mother, “Your daughter is having a problem with math, and I doubt that she’ll ever want to be in a field where she uses numbers.”

However, holding the purse strings of Thomas County for nearly 30 years and through seven elections says a lot about Applebury’s ability to deal with numbers.

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