

2017 Achievements at the El Paso County Tax Collector's Office

Ruben P. Gonzalez

The El Paso County Tax Assessor-Collector's Office has finished 2017 very successfully and attained excellent goals after the completion of the 85th Texas Legislative Session. We provide local title and registration services to our citizens, automobile dealerships, financial institutions, and motoring public. New services and programs that affect our citizenry and county are listed below.

Our Enforcement Division, has done a marvelous job in collecting revenue under the Dealer Vehicle Inventory Tax Program. They have collected motor vehicle sales taxes from unscrupulous "tax evaders" on "rebuilt salvage" transactions, El Paso residents displaying out of state plates past 30 days, improved enforcement of "curbstoning" (unlicensed vehicles sales), performed legal VIN inspections on selected vehicles to protect our consumers and innocent buyers, and recovered fifteen stolen vehicles with a book value exceeding \$280 thousand. This year alone, the Enforcement Section has brought in close to \$222 thousand in revenue to support the El Paso County General Fund.

On January 1, 2017, the TxDMV approved a new processing and handling (P&H) fee of \$4.75 for a transaction processed by our office to include our private contracted offices. From the \$4.75 fee, the county receives \$2.30 per transaction when processed in/or mailed to our office and the remainder goes to Texas. El Paso County receives only \$1.30 when transactions are processed by authorized deputies. This fee structure causes a \$1.00 per transaction hardship to the county. Ultimately, our county would be in the red in revenue collections under this formula. Nonetheless, our office implemented a "concessionary fee" alternative to be paid by any authorized deputy acting on behalf of the County Tax Collector. This approach has replenished the potential lost funding in compensation and has allowed our office to maintain our revenues in the black for our County General Fund. We are the first county in Texas using this innovative idea to avoid a revenue shortfall for our County. As of December 31, 2017, we have collected over \$180 thousand under this method for an eight-month period.

New laws and amendments such as allowing our office to issue a no charge replacement plate/sticker when lost in the mail, procedures on repairing/rebuilding a "rebuilt salvage" vehicle for titling, new law on enforcing "indigent" SCOFFLAW collections, requiring "VIN Inspections" for certain title transactions such as "VIN errors", "assigned numbers", "no record" and "Bonded" title transactions, and eliminating the need for a seller of a motor vehicle to sign the seller's affidavit for sales tax purposes. We have made a strong commitment to enhancing the quality of our services and information that includes efficient customer service. Our Training Coordinator has implemented training programs that support our Automobile Dealer Industry (New & Used), Private Contracted offices, and our strongest asset, our county employees.

Our office is proactive in providing Sexual Harassment Training to our managers and staff. Meetings have been held to educate, prevent, and enforce County Policy when dealing with Sexual Harassment in the Workplace to protect our employees, management, and ultimately the County of El Paso.

We have facilitated Motor Vehicle Sales Tax Training performed by the State Comptroller that has clarified policy and brought new knowledge to our staff and contracted offices to benefit our County.

Our office Property Tax Collections in January 2017 exceeded collections from January 2016 in both dollars and transaction count. Customers found it more convenient and less challenging to pay their property taxes at our six office locations. We appreciate our citizens when they choose to visit our offices. With new software, we have automated our check handling procedures for mail-in registrations that allows our staff to process mail registrations and deposit check payments straight to the bank on the same day eliminating further verifications by our accounting department.

The citizens of El Paso County can be assured that in 2018, our office will be involved with many new projects promoted by Texas. El Paso County is ranked seventh in the state in vehicle population and we contribute highly in overall Registration and Motor Vehicle Sales Tax revenues each year for our County and State budgets. We have an excellent working relationship with TxDMV who rely on our feedback when it pertains to County funds accountability, VIN Inspections, Web-Dealer programs, Rebuilt Salvage Enforcement, Fraudulent Title Transactions, and supporting our contracted private offices. One

of our major goals is to bring in revenue from El Paso residents who should be paying motor vehicle fees legitimately and not circumventing them. There is a high volume of vehicle registration violators operating on our city and county roadways. Our desire is that our 2017 fee collections will support all citizens with their annual property tax statements since our collections to the general fund help determine if property taxes go up or stay the same each year.

Our goal continues to be delivering quality customer service using advanced technology. Working in the best interest for the citizens of El Paso County, we will continue to promote public confidence and demonstrate the leadership and management skills worthy of a public office.

Ruben P. Gonzalez, El Paso County Tax Assessor-Collector and has over 41 years of experience in administering Texas Title and Registration statutes.