



Columbus City Attorney

Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr. eNewsletter

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A Word from City Attorney Pfeiffer

One of the most important aspects of being City Attorney, at least in my opinion, is keeping a pulse on what is happening in our neighborhoods and on our streets. That’s why I’m always on the go, visiting neighborhoods throughout Columbus, meeting people, talking and connecting with them, and finding out what are the pressing concerns of our residents.



I call it a *mosey*. According to *Merriam-Webster*, “mosey” is an intransitive verb meaning “to move in a leisurely or aimless manner.” But there is nothing aimless about meeting people in their community setting, hearing what they have to say, and seeing the physical attributes of their neighborhood with one’s own eyes. It energizes me and inspires me every day, as my appreciation for the diversity of Columbus neighborhoods and the indomitable spirit of our residents is always reinforced.

Now, after many years in public office, I’m also taking a different type of mosey: the digital kind. Social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter are providing me with another medium to communicate with people and exchange information. Social media will never replace the tried-and-true method of meeting people face-to-face, but it is one more way to provide accessibility to me and my staff at the City Attorney’s office. We are also using Facebook and Twitter for some new initiatives that you will learn more about later in this e-newsletter.

If you haven’t done so already, I encourage you to join us on [Facebook](#) or follow us on [Twitter](#). And, maybe we’ll run into each other on my next mosey....

Reclaiming Funds for Columbus Taxpayers

In an ongoing effort to level the playing field for honest, law-abiding taxpayers, the City Attorney’s Claims Section has been recovering delinquent taxes and fees through an accounts receivable collection program since 1996. The program has proven to be highly successful in obtaining payments from those who otherwise were refusing to live up to their responsibility and pay their fair share.

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City Attorney Pfeiffer takes this matter very seriously and in-house collections have more than doubled since he took office in 2003, up from an annual total of \$882,878.73 in 2002 to **\$2,125,521.37** in 2010.

Continuing the trend, Claims Section Chief Nancy Weidman and her staff are on pace to break last year's record, as their collection efforts through April of this year were eight percent higher than the same time period last year.

Of course, the **vast** majority of citizens pay their city income taxes in full or quickly correct an error when an honest mistake is brought to their attention. This responsibility is critical, as income tax receipts account for approximately 71% of the city's general revenue fund budget, which pays for police and fire, refuse collection, city parks and recreation centers, job creation and economic development efforts, and all other operating expenses for city government.

Tax debtors have ample opportunity to set up a payment plan prior to any legal action taken against them to ensure simple errors and mistakes are rectified. Before a case even reaches Section Chief Weidman and her staff, an individual or business entity first must fail to respond to multiple notices and warnings from the [Income Tax Division](#) in City Auditor Hugh J. Dorrian's office over the course of several months. Once the Income Tax Division exhausts all options, the matter is turned over to the City Attorney's Claims Section, which also attempts to set up a short-term payment plan with the tax debtor. If the debtor is still non-responsive, the City Attorney's office files a claim in either Small Claims Court, Municipal Court, or the Court of Common Pleas, depending on the amount of money owed to the city.

If the tax debtor and the Claims Section are able to agree on a negotiated payment plan, an agreed judgment entry is filed with the respective court and, if sanctioned by the court, is recorded as a binding judgment. If the tax debtor fails yet another time to take action once a claim is filed in court, a default judgment will be issued. All default judgments are sent to outside collection agencies, which triggers an extra 30% collection fee that the debtor must pay in addition to the delinquent taxes owed to the city. This additional administrative fee was incorporated in 2009 after legislation, proposed by City Attorney

Top 10 Mistakes People Make in Filing a Tax Return

10. Failure to sign return or attach check
9. Failure to file estimate
8. Failure to advise of address changes
7. Failure to file return for the year taxpayer moves in or out
6. Failure to allocate taxes paid when allocating income for move-in/move-out year
5. Failure to pay 2nd, 3rd and 4th quarter estimated tax payments
4. Failure to mail return
3. Failure to attach Schedules/Forms and statements
2. Failure to attach W-2
1. Failure to use gross compensation

Source: *Income Tax Division, Office of City Auditor Hugh J. Dorrian*

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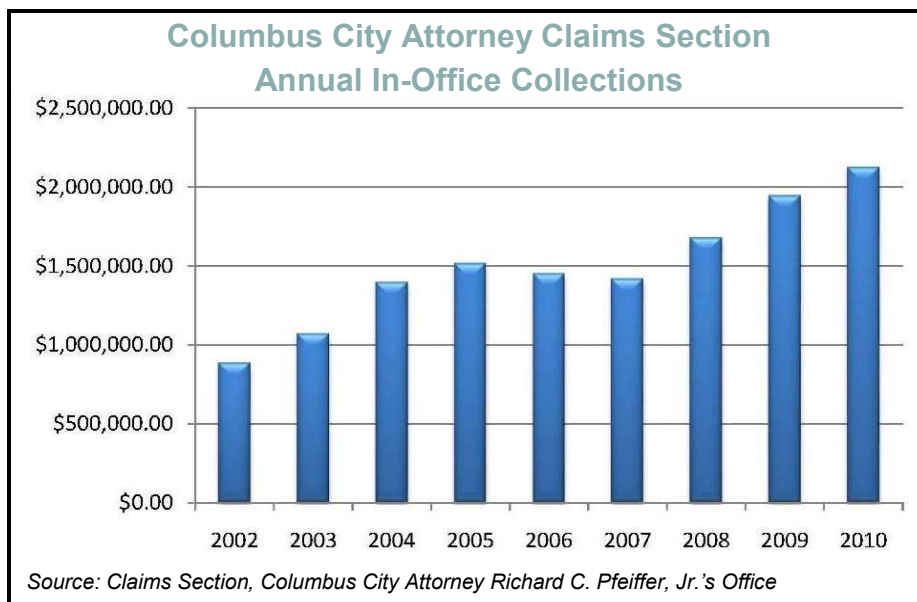
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Pfeiffer and sponsored by Councilmember [Eileen Paley](#), was adopted by City Council. The legislation ensures that the city recovers all of its outstanding debt, and the fee for collection services is added to what the debtor owes.



The Claims Section also worked closely with the City Auditor Dorrian's office to step up collection enforcement against delinquent Hotel-Motel Excise Tax debtors, and assisted in the development of new procedures which enable the city to stop payment to vendors doing business with the city who are also tax debtors, until the tax delinquency is resolved.

It is also important to note that business owners are held **personally** liable if they do not pay the tax withholdings they take from their employees. For information on other tax-related questions, click on the Income Tax Division [FAQ](#).

How Twitter Took Down a Tagger

After watching *The Social Network*, and intrigued by reports that demonstrators in Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries used social media to help organize and direct their protest movements, City Attorney Pfeiffer decided to explore potential ways to better utilize electronic communication in his office. He also took note of [Mayor Coleman's](#) launch of [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts to help the public report potholes on city streets.

One of the first steps taken was the creation of the "Fugitive of the Week" program, which uses social media channels to communicate and obtain information on individuals with outstanding arrest warrants. This new project has two basic goals, using Facebook and Twitter to:

1. alert the public about the potential danger of individuals who appear to display contempt for the rule of law by failing to appear in court to answer charges against them
2. gather information from the public that may help lead to the apprehension of alleged wrongdoers

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The early results have been promising, as three targets were taken into custody during the first month of the initiative’s launch.

The “Fugitive of the Week” arrest that received the most media attention was the apprehension of [Kyle C.J. Lamblez](#), a graffiti tagger who skipped out on his court appearance in 2009 when he was faced with the prospect of receiving his third graffiti-related conviction in less than two years. Lamblez, 25, was featured on the City Attorney’s Facebook page on April 27 and within hours, a tip was posted. Chief of Staff Bill R. Hedrick, who heads up the fugitive apprehension program, followed this initial lead and was able to forward additional information about Lamblez from his Twitter, Facebook, and Formspring accounts to the City Attorney’s cyber investigator and the Columbus Police Division’s Strategic Response Bureau (SRB). From there, it was good, old-fashioned police work as SRB tracked down Lamblez, who began absconding from what Hedrick described as “one safe house to the next” in an effort to evade arrest. After three weeks on the run, Lamblez was apprehended and remains in jail awaiting sentencing.

“We live in a rapidly changing digital environment and we have to be ready to adapt new methods of communication and social interaction into crime fighting tools.”

**City Attorney
Richard C. Pfeiffer, Jr.**

Along with Lamblez, [Amy Stover](#) and [Angel Barido](#) also were taken into custody as a result of City Attorney Pfeiffer’s digital crime-fighting efforts. Stover, 27, turned herself in after being targeted, as she and her alleged boyfriend were wanted on dozens of counts of animal cruelty and other charges. Barido, 30, was apprehended by SRB after avoiding arrest for three years on two charges of animal abandonment. She was also wanted on two other, unrelated charges of driving under suspension and using fictitious license plates.

Given the initial success of the “Fugitive of the Week” project, City Attorney Pfeiffer considers the ability to disseminate information exponentially via social networks as a digital complement to other force multipliers such as Community Crime Patrol and the Police Helicopter Unit. In a virtual sense, Facebook and Twitter users and their network of friends can help serve as potentially thousands of additional “eyes and ears” in helping combat crime.

City Attorney Pfeiffer and Chief of Staff Hedrick are quick to point out that the successful start is only due to the coordinated efforts of the Strategic Response Bureau and the help of the public.

To become a virtual “force multiplier” sign up on [Facebook](#) and follow on [Twitter](#).



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While Nancy L. Weidman prefers to remain humbly behind the scenes recovering funds and assisting fiscal officers in the many different branches of city government, the work she and her staff perform on a daily basis on behalf of Columbus taxpayers has brought much-warranted attention to the City Attorney's Claims Section. As stated earlier, Nancy and her staff are on pace to break their record from last year and recover over \$2.1 million in funds that can be used for the city's operating expenses such as, for example, helping pay for new police and fire recruit classes and covering court costs to file nuisance abatement actions in Environmental Court.

Serving as Claims Section Chief since 2005, Nancy began her career with the City Attorney's office in 1989 when she moved from the Central Ohio Transit Authority (COTA) to the Real Estate Division. She also served as a prosecutor and an assistant city attorney in the civil litigation and business regulation sections, giving her a wide breadth of knowledge of the different departments in the City Attorney's office. Having the opportunity to learn something new and expand her knowledge base is one of the aspects she appreciates most about her role in the Claims Section. Working with the City Auditor, City Treasurer, and numerous departments and divisions such as Utilities, Recreation and Parks, Transportation and many others affords Nancy a unique perspective to see how the different systems in city government function and inter-relate. Helping recover funds for all these departments gives her insight into diverse city operations from litigation to planting street trees, paving roads, building inspection, and installing ADA curb ramps.

Nancy is particularly proud of her work with City Auditor Hugh J. Dorrian to devise a system to cross-check the Claims Section database of judgments with the Purchasing Office's database of vendors to identify delinquent tax debtors trying to do business with the city. Due to her collaboration with Mr. Dorrian, the city now has the ability to stop payment to these debtors until their tax delinquency is resolved.

While no one necessarily wants to talk to the proverbial "tax collector," Nancy strongly encourages anyone who has questions or concerns about city taxes or fees they may owe to call the Claims Section at 645-7717 or contact the Income Tax Division. "We understand that people sometimes find themselves in tough financial spots and we want to work with them to arrive at an equitable solution," she says. By ignoring the initial notices from the Income Tax Division, delinquent debtors incur additional penalties. If a case gets to the point where the City Attorney's office has no other recourse but to file a court claim, interest is incurred on top of the initial amount and penalties owed. Furthermore, once a default judgment is rendered against a delinquent debtor, a 30% collection fee is assessed to the total amount owed (the principal amount and the cost of the penalties and interest).

Nancy's advice is straightforward: "Don't ignore the problem; it doesn't go away. It only gets worse." When in doubt, call the Claims Section. It is much better in the long-run.



Nancy L. Weidman

Title: Chief, Claims Section

Education: Capital University Law School, J.D., 1988

Miami University, B.A., 1980
Worthington High School



Just the Facts

According to Facebook:

- There are more than 600 million active users worldwide
- The average user has 130 friends, is connected to 80 community pages, groups and events and creates 90 pieces of content each month
- People spend over 30 billion minutes per day on Facebook
- There are over 900 million objects that people interact with (pages, groups, events and community pages)
- More than 30 billion pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photo albums, etc.) are shared each month.



According to Twittergrader.com:

- City Attorney Pfeiffer ranked in the top 28% of all active Twitter users worldwide (2,671,931 out of all 9,593,481). Not bad for an elected official serving for almost 30 years who just began tweeting less than two months ago!

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