

CASE STUDY



HOWARD COUNTY APPLIES INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO TAX AND BILLING OPERATIONS

MVPTax from Thomson Reuters Also Facilitates Conformance to Changing State Requirements for Processing Parcel Tax Payments

Located in the north-central section of Indiana, Howard County was first known as Richardville County but changed its name in 1844 to honor General Tilghman Howard, a US Representative. The county covers nearly 300 square miles and is home to approximately 83,000 citizens. The townships across Howard County include 45,000 land parcels and 5,000 personal properties, mostly mobile homes and business equipment.

THE CHALLENGE

The Howard County auditor's office has relied on MVPTax from Thomson Reuters since 1986. Auditor Martha Lake and Treasurer Ann Wells recall that they deployed MVPTax at a point in time when the county was going through difficult challenges trying to process tax bills accurately and collect payments on time.

"We were on an aging legacy tax system that did not work well, and we faced a particularly hectic tax year right about then," Lake says.

Howard County hoped to identify a solution that would make processing refunds and the cash book more efficient. The county also needed a better system for collecting taxes and keeping accurate records of all the different parcels in each county township.

"Because of just how hectic it was at that time, we also wanted to make sure we avoided any legal action due to improper tax processing," Wells says. "We knew that advanced technology would allow our staff to improve its efficiency while also reducing the number of times we came across inaccurate data."

THE SOLUTION

Nearly 30 years later, Lake and Wells can confirm Howard County clearly found the answer to its challenges in MVPTax. The solution delivers flexible property tax billing and collection capabilities designed specifically for collection officials in Indiana. MVPTax is also supported by the Thomson Reuters development staff based in Indiana and is the first tax solution to be Phase 2 Certified by the Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF).

In addition to the solution's tax processing capabilities, Lake and Wells appreciate the true partnership Thomson Reuters has forged over the many years. "Compared to other software partners we work with, Thomson Reuters goes far beyond simply offering solutions," Wells says. "Through their Advisory Committee (consisting of auditors, treasurers and IT personnel from counties across Indiana that also use MVPTax), they listen to our input as to how well the software performs and what changes we would like to see. Thomson Reuters then prioritizes based on what most counties want."

Thomson Reuters also provides information to Howard County on state requirements that MVPTax needs to comply with in order to maintain certification with the state. "They help us stay in tune with legislators as far as tax requirements we need to fulfill," Wells says. "Thomson Reuters makes sure their software stays in compliance with state regulations to ensure we can keep using them as our tax software partner."

THE DEPLOYMENT

The Howard County auditor and treasurer staffs, which include approximately 25 personnel who work in the county office and in the field, have been self-sufficient in using all the capabilities provided by MVPTax. But they sometimes call upon Thomson Reuters for help with report generation, especially around settlement time.

Following the initial training that Thomson Reuters provided, the two staffs have retained the instructions to handle most day-to-day tasks easily on their own, such as simple transfers and deductions.

"The way that Thomson Reuters provides training makes it very easy to use the system to its full extent," Lake says.

As part of the MVPTax deployment, Thomson Reuters showed Howard County how to execute automatic uploads to the property valuation system used by the Assessor's Office. Thomson Reuters also showed how to connect MVPTax to the county's cloud-based invoice system. "They work with our other software partners very effectively, which is important because we rely heavily on data integration among all the systems," Lake says.

THE BENEFITS

The Howard County staff particularly appreciates the expertise Thomson Reuters provides when setting up new TIF districts. The solution has also helped the county develop new forms that make it simpler to balance township accounts.

"The efficiency of our staff in using MVPTax has increased steadily over the years as Thomson Reuters regularly applies software updates," adds Lake.

"Thomson Reuters works diligently with the state to streamline our data uploads, which helps us achieve our mission to be transparent—everything we do is published on a website by the state."

At one point, in order to comply with a new state mandate, Howard County had to arrange every tax bill and coupon in duplicate order, post the bills and the coupons to every duplicate book, and then balance the receipts to every page in the book. The task was made more challenging by the requirement from the state for Howard County to change from using three separate account numbers—for parcel tracking, tax bills and assessments—to just one account number.

"We had to expand parcel numbers from 10 to 18 digits and then move the township numbers to the end of the number string," Wells explains. "It was a major transition, but Thomson Reuters helped us balance everything, making sure the new numbers all uploaded into MVPTax correctly so that fields matched and the history from all three historical account numbers came over into the one new number. How we did it in less than two months was a miracle—it would not have been possible without help from Thomson Reuters."

When Howard County needs to add specific functionality to MVPTax, the Thomson Reuters support team always comes through. "One year, we had income tax payments for which extra money came back from the state," Wells says. "Our county decided they wanted to give this money back to taxpayers who were Homesteaders, but this was a new process for us. Right before we sent out the tax bills that year, Thomson Reuters programmed the software specifically for us so that we could post credits to the tax bills before we sent them out. This is a great example of how they've gone above and beyond for us many times over the years."

THOMSON REUTERS IN INDIANA

What local government officials do is too important to trust to just anyone. The experience of your software solution partner matters. That's why for the past 46 years, we've worked to make sure our Indiana customers get the support and functionality they need for both their CAMA and property tax solutions.

Our customers enjoy many benefits:

- Collaborating with over 300 Thomson Reuters employees who live and work in the state of Indiana serving Indiana customers
- Utilizing the first CAMA (ProVal) and Tax (MVPTax) solution to be Phase 2 Certified by the Department of Local Government Finance (DLGF)
- Sharing experiences with a mature user group that is over 10 years old and continues to grow

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