



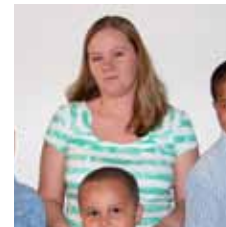
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# The Observer

Volume 44 • Issue 1



## Westside Bloomington residents take action

### Bloomington residents hope to form new council to address West Side issues

Memuna Lee, Community Builder & Organizer

On March 18, ten residents of the Holton Homes and Sunny Side public housing developments gathered in the hope of improving the quality of life for their children, and being part of the change.

The meeting was called by Mid Central Community Action, Inc. and the Bloomington Housing Authority in the hope of identifying residents who would be willing and able to form a Resident Council. Flyers were distributed, announcements were posted in churches, and phone calls were made in an effort to activate those citizens who want to be part of the change. Residents brought their hopes, dreams, and their children to MCCA. They actively considered, as a group, how to tackle the gang violence they saw around them, the broken playground equipment their children had to play on and the trash that they saw laying on the ground in front of their homes. Participants identified those issues and more as their main areas of concern and desired action

on the part of the Residents Council they hope to form.

There is no way to know how this will end, but it is certainly an inspirational beginning. At the end of the meeting participants were able to self-nominate. Nominations for President, Vice President and Secretary for each site will be accepted until the April 18<sup>th</sup>. Elections will be held shortly after that date.

How these residents ended up in that room is the story of how two organizations can make



PHOTO: MEMUNA LEE

great things happen when they collaborate. MCCA rolled out the Community Building and Organizing program in April of 2009. After closely evaluating and mapping community assets the Bloomington Housing Authority, and the Sunny Side housing development were identified as community assets that could be worked with to improve the quality of life for residents of West Bloomington. The Housing Authority was approached, and was eager to partner in a greater effort to make West Bloomington a better place to live, work and play for everyone. There has not been an active residents council at either Sunny Side or Holton Homes for at least the last five years. Officials at BHA recognize the value of an active and engaged Residents Council and put great effort into making the meeting a success by engaging in very active outreach and staying the course in making this meeting happen.



PHOTO: MEMUNA LEE

## Thank you!



Thank you to Katya Anderson of [www.nonprofitmarketingblog.com](http://www.nonprofitmarketingblog.com) for choosing MCCA as the recipient of a new HP laptop computer and printer!

Katya hosted a competition

on her blog where non-profits were encouraged to submit a story, telling how technology helps them change lives. Our prize-winning story was about Amy Liechtenberg, and how she used the power of technology

to spread awareness about the budget cuts affecting Neville House and our Countering Domestic Violence program.

Thank you, Katya and HP's "Create Change" program!

# Dates to Remember

## ■ Saturday April 10

### **Celebration of Life in honor of Jack Leichtenberg's 9th birthday**

Face painting, children's fingerprinting, balloon artist, balloon release. Amy invites you to donate a toy to Neville House.

*Swingers Grille, 1304 Cross Creek Dr · Normal  
from 2:00 pm–4:00 pm*

## ■ Saturday April 10

### **Home Buyer Education Class**

## ■ Sunday April 11

### **3 on 3 Basketball Tournament**

Sponsored by FLAME, Phi Sigma Pi, Red Tassel/Mortar Board, Sigma Sigma Sigma.

Proceeds benefit Neville House

Starts @ 1:00pm; Registration @ noon (\$5.00 per person)  
*Illinois State University*

## ■ Tuesday April 13 & Wednesday April 14

### **Pitching Clinic for 3rd-8th grade Girls**

Hosted by Normal West Softball Team

FREE—bring a canned good for Neville House

*Champion Fields, Maxwell Park, Cnr Parkside Rd & Gregory St, Normal from 3:30-5:30pm*

## ■ Friday April 16th

### **Hands are for Holding Mini Parade**

McLean County Child Abuse Prevention Coalition—Bring your children and a decorated wagon

*Miller Park Pavilion, Bloomington @ 10:00am*

## ■ Monday April 19

### **"Healing: Community Collaboration in Response to Children Affected by Violence"**

\$25 for Students / CASAs; \$40 for Professionals; \$50 for Professionals (with 6 CEU/CLEs)

To register contact Trisha @ ABC Counseling & Family Services @ 451-9495 by 04/12

*The Parke Hotel & Conference Center, 1413 Leslie Dr, Bloomington  
8:30am–4:30pm*

## ■ Monday April 26 & Wednesday April 28

### **Home Buyer Education Class**

## ■ Friday May 14

### **SAVE THE DATE! "It's A Mystery" Dinner**

brought to you by the "Friends of Neville House".

## ■ Friday May 14

### **12th Annual Senior Fair—sponsored by MCCA**

*Pontiac Bible Church, Route 116 West, Pontiac IL  
10:00 am–1:00 pm*

## ■ Monday May 17 & Wednesday May 19

### **Home Buyer Education Class**

## ■ Tuesday June 22 & Thursday June 24

### **Home Buyer Education Class**

Home Buyer Education classes are held at MCCA, 1301 W Washington St, Bloomington.

For further information or to register, contact Kathy Shubert, (309) 834-9245

## *The* **Observer**

*A quarterly newsletter of  
Mid Central Community Action, Inc.*

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**M**id Central Community Action, Inc. (MCCA) is an Illinois private not-for-profit corporation with the mission of "Promoting safe and stable families, neighborhoods and communities." The agency works with government agencies, private corporations and individual citizens, including those we serve, to develop and maintain programs which address this mission.

Incorporated in 1965, the agency today delivers services to the community in three main areas. First, there is a group of countering domestic violence programs; including a shelter, emergency hot line, counseling, and intervention services for victims. We also offer the whole spectrum of traditional Community Action programs including energy assistance, home weatherization, transitional housing, and supportive case management. The third area is that of housing; again a group of programs including home ownership counseling, down payment assistance, foreclosure prevention, residential lending, and construction of housing units.

In addition to being one of 1100 Community Action agencies in the United States, MCCA is a chartered member of the NeighborWorks® America network of housing development and neighborhood revitalization organizations.

In a typical year, MCCA programs serve more than 5000 families. It also assists some 100 families in various ways to become home owners, which is considered one of the best roads to economic stability for a family.

*Promoting safe and stable families, neighborhoods and communities*

What if Mid Central Community Action, Inc. earned a penny every time YOU searched the internet? Search the web with [www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com) and money from Yahoo advertisers will go to MCCA without you spending a dime!

Donate now through our web site!

Donating has never been easier! Visit [www.mccainc.org](http://www.mccainc.org) to make your donation today. Safely. Securely.



# American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Programs

## Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program shows results

Cathy Grafton, Director of Community Services

The HUD American Recovery and Reinvestment Act program to help prevent homelessness began on October 1, 2009. Mid Central Community Action, Inc. is a participant in this program known as Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing (HPRP). We have three case workers who work with families and individuals who are at risk of becoming homeless or who are currently homeless. The program offers short term and medium

term assistance along with case management to help change the situation which has created the homeless condition. This program is funded for two years through the ARRA or stimulus funds. The case workers have understandably been swamped with calls from people requesting assistance through this program. We do have a pre-application form to help them determine eligibility for the program. Our website lists the income guidelines for the program which are 50% of area median income.

Here is a story of how this program can help a family from one of our case workers Molly Moore.

“TL and her family were displaced by a fire. The apartment manager/owner was not able to offer them another apartment. The family was helped by the

Red Cross for two nights in a hotel, but after those two nights, there were no additional funds available. TL and her family were forced to rent a bedroom from an acquaintance as a temporary place to stay at the cost of several hundred dollars per month. The family had lost most everything in the fire, so all of the income the family had coming in was going toward paying rent, purchasing food and replacing clothing and other items lost in the fire.

The family saw no other way to manage while they saved up for a deposit and rent for a place of their own. TL heard about the MCCA Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program and contacted the case worker. She worked with them and the program helped with a security deposit and partial first month's rent. This family was so grateful for these funds which helped them get into another home.”



HTTP://WWW.FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/UOFDENVER

## Sustainable Agriculture Program

Cathy Grafton, Director of Community Services

This past year, Mid Central Community Action, Inc. has been partnering with the Green Institute at Heartland Community College to create a Sustainable Agriculture program to teach small scale farming skills and techniques. It will provide 3 to 5 month internships for low-income students. Those who qualify will receive scholarships of up to \$4,500 per student to help sustain them while

they complete the coursework. The program has been in development since August and has provided a job for an intern who is working with Julie Elzanati, the Coordinator of the Green Institute, to line up host farmers and set-up the program.

Mid Central Community Action has provided funding for start up and work-study expenses through the ARRA (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act). The program is a work-study and training program to teach about sustainable farming through hands-on participation with the main focus of study on horticultural products, dairy and cheese, fruits and herbs. This program is designed to prepare students to participate in

farmer's markets or to sell locally to businesses and grocers. This program originated from a brainstorming session between Heartland Community College, MCCA staff and Marty & Kris Travis who own Spence farm in Fairbury, Illinois. Spence Farm is the oldest family farm in Livingston County and is experienced in producing local products which are sold in grocery stores and to Chicago area restaurants. Marty and Kris also created the Spence Farm Foundation which helps to educate the public on small scale farming and promotes preservation of and education on techniques for sustainable farming. You can visit their website at [www.thespencefarm.com](http://www.thespencefarm.com) for more information on the farm and their ongoing activities.

Enrollment information for the Sustainable Ag Program can be found by contacting the Green Institute at Heartland or Julie Elzanati at 309-268-8166.



Spence Farm, Fairbury

PHOTO: KRIS TRAVIS

# Countering Domestic Violence



CDV Advocates enjoyed participating in Catholic Charities International Fest for children on February 20th

On February 20th, advocates from the CDV program had the opportunity to participate in 40th International Fest at ISU, hosted by Catholic Charities.

Catholic Charities wanted children to be able to experience more of our “big world” here in Bloomington-Normal by participating in multicultural crafts, games and entertainment. Our advocates chose to represent Guatemala, which made for a very colorful craft table!



## CDV by the numbers: October to December 2009

- 338 clients served
- 2,513 services provided to victims
- 980 victims served via the 24-hour crisis hotline
- 26 adults protected for 375 nights
- 22 children protected for 360 nights
- 220 victims informed of their rights according to IDVA law
- 165 victims provided with criminal justice advocacy/court accompaniment
- 182 victims provided with civil legal advocacy/court accompaniment
- 165 victims received notification of case status regarding the criminal process.
- 70 victims received in-person contacts
- 160 victims received telephone contacts for information and referrals
- 185 victims received personal advocacy support
- 220 victims received follow-up contact
- 64 victims assisted in receiving 52 Emergency Orders of Protection and 7 Plenary Orders of Protection.
- 29 of the EOPs were upgraded to POPs

## Thank you!

February was a busy month for awareness events.

We are very grateful for the continued partnership with ISU FLAME to empower women and educate campus and community members. We thank you for the “Vagina Monologues” and for your financial contribution to help victims of domestic violence.

Thank you to the volunteers at the Moses Montefiore temple for including projects for CDV as part of your day of service.

We also appreciate our NEW partnership with Xohdus Productions. Mrs. Bush’s “Trial of the Century” was entertaining and enlightening as we learned about “Folly vs. Wisdom”. Thank you for choosing Neville House as the recipient of the play proceeds

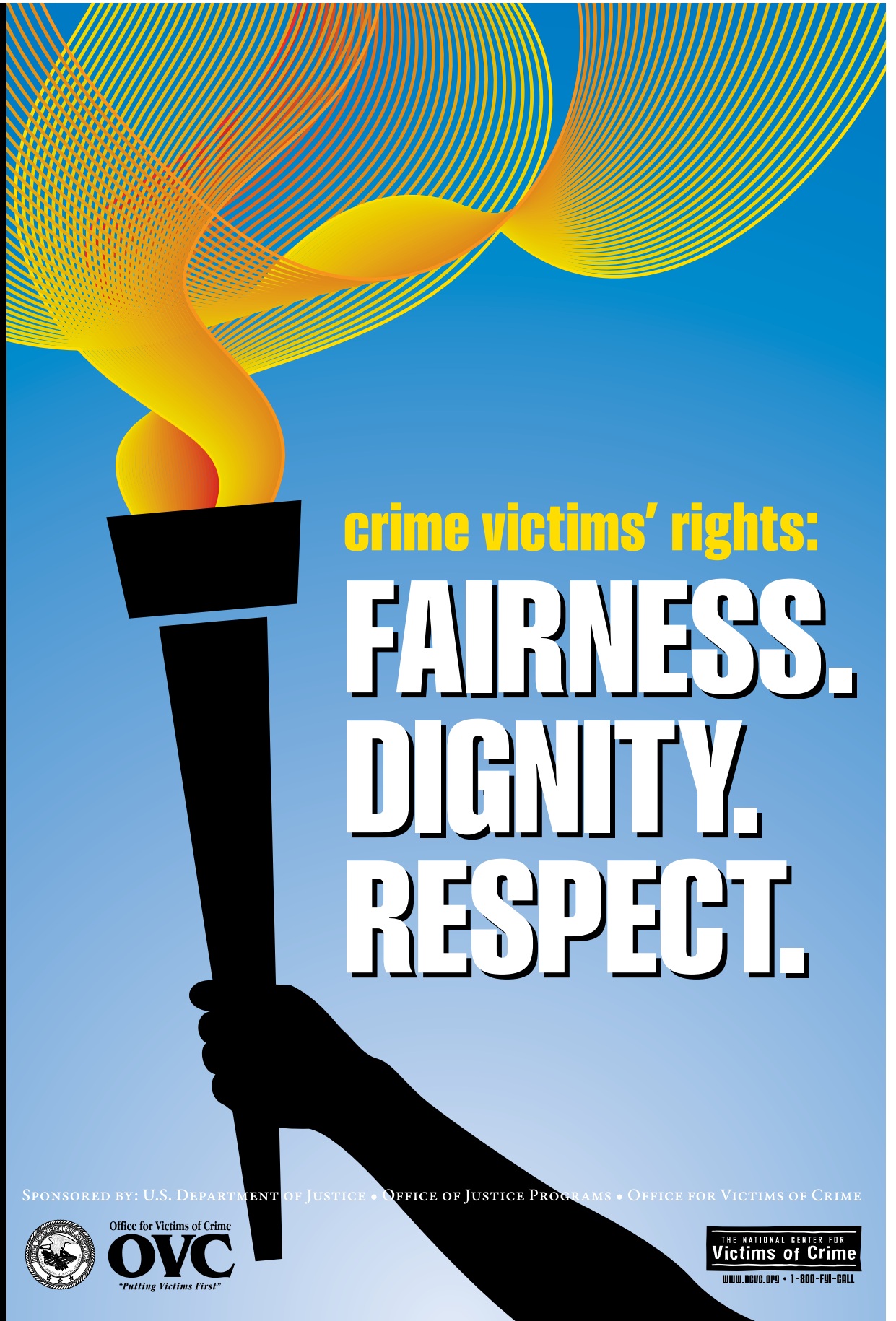
“I will not be judged today by my yesterday ... today I begin again, focused on the success I will create today”.  
Mike Jones

McLean County Domestic  
Violence  
24-hour Hotline  
(309) 827-7070

Countering  
Domestic  
Violence

.... from victim to victor

**NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS WEEK | APRIL 18-24, 2010**



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**DIGNITY.**  
**RESPECT.**

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# Prepared for Disaster

## COOP—Continuity of Operations Plan ensures we have an emergency plan

Cathy Grafton, Director of Community Services

The COOP program—Continuity of Operations Plan—was developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Department of Homeland Security.

The program is being mandated for federal government agencies and strongly recommended for agencies and businesses across the country. MCCA staff attended COOP training last year and began working on a plan for our agency. We were delighted to have our COOP project chosen by the Multi Cultural Leadership Program team, which is currently working with us to collect and organize the data we will need to have a viable plan.

Our MCLP team has interviewed key agency personnel to help us identify our essential functions – those we need to continue during a disaster. They are now helping us to create a format, so that we can continue to design our COOP.

A COOP team from MCCA will keep the plan updated and train staff as necessary so we will be better prepared to handle any disasters that might affect our agency or our community.



PHOTO: DOUG PIEPER, PONTIAC

On January 7th, after heavy winter rains, the Vermillion River reached record heights and caused serious flooding in the town of Pontiac. Mid Central Community Action, Inc. immediately went to work to assist seniors and other clients.

# Bloomington family nominated for Family of Distinction Award

Becky Berry, Community Services Case Worker

Samanthe Boyd of Bloomington has been nominated as a candidate for the Illinois Association of Community Action Agencies (IACAA) 2010 Family of Distinction for her achievement of completing MCCA's Individual Development Account pilot program. Ms. Boyd is a 26 year old single mother of three sons, ages 9, 8 and 5. She works full time for a cleaning company with an annual income of \$24,000 (125% poverty level for a family of 4).

In October 2007, Samanthe inquired about the IDA program, which was created for the purpose to help participants gain financial literacy and save money for the purchase of a home. After enrolling in the program, Samanthe deposited at least \$10 per week into her account for the next two years. Also, during this time, she became familiar with banks and savings accounts; learned budgeting skills; built assets; repaired credit; took the Homebuyer's Education class; and received monthly case management that included referrals, guidance, and support. On November 30, 2009, two years after beginning the IDA program, Samanthe was able to buy her first home.

M C C A

matched Samanthe's savings of \$1000 with a 2 to 1 match (for a total MCCA contribution of \$2,000). In addition, she was eligible for an Affordable Housing Coalition grant of \$5,000 because she had successfully completed the Homebuyer's Education class through MCCA's housing department.

Samanthe's life journey puts this amazing accomplishment into perspective and demonstrates Ms. Boyd's dream of "owning my own home for us" and her determination to create the best life possible for herself and her sons.

You can read Samanthe's story, and how, on a salary of just \$280 a week, she overcame many obstacles to buy her first home online at [www.MCCAinc.org](http://www.MCCAinc.org)

Samanthe and her sons are now enjoying their three bedroom home with a finished basement in Bloomington.

Ms. Boyd ends her story with these words: "I'm really thankful for this (IDA) program and everyone who as helped me at Mid Central Community Action."



Samanthe Boyd and her family

PHOTO: BECKY BERRY

*Please consider investing in Mid Central Community Action, Inc's programs by making a donation today.*

Please accept my donation of:

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ \$20 \_\_\_\_\_ \$10 \_\_\_\_\_ \$5 \_\_\_\_\_ \$other

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail your tax-deductible donation to:  
Mid Central Community Action, Inc.  
Vikki Baptiste, Development Specialist  
1301 W. Washington St  
Bloomington, IL 61701

*Thank* **You**

**Donate online with just one click at [www.MCCAinc.org](http://www.MCCAinc.org)**

**Management and staff of Mid Central Community Action, Inc. would like to thank you for your continued support throughout 2009, and wish you all the best for 2010. Thank you!**

Save the date **06.18.10**  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream:  
Celebrating Dreams in Action*  
Mid Central Community Action, Inc's Annual  
Fundraising Dinner and  
Dreamweaver Award Celebration  
Doubletree Hotel • 10 Brickyard Dr • Bloomington

**Our Mission:** Promoting safe and stable families, neighborhoods and communities  
Mid Central Community Action, Inc. serves McLean and Livingston Counties



# How to get your property taxes lowered

Memuna Lee, Community Builder & Organizer

## Workshop presented by Cranston Sparks, Broker

**H**ave you ever received your property tax bill and gasped? I know I have. Have you found yourself owing more on your mortgage than your home is worth—yet your property tax bill has gone up? I know someone who has.

Whats a reasonable person to do? You cant fight City Hall -can you? Apparently, yes you can.

Last night I found myself in the front row of a workshop detailing how a regular person can attempt to fight City Hall—at least regarding their property taxes.

Real estate expert and broker, Cranston Sparks, made it very plain and easy to understand how your taxes are calculated, and



Realtor, Cranston Sparks

what you can do if you think you are being overcharged by the government.

My take-away: If you truly believe you are being overtaxed, give the assessors office a call, explain clearly why you feel this way—based on some kind of concrete data or example, and they may agree with you. This is called an informal appeal, which you can do anytime but recommended between January and August. If your informal appeal is rejected, you generally have 30 days to request a formal appeal. It is best to consult with a professional realtor in order to determine the fair market value of your home, and arm yourself with more information. At this point you can move towards the formal appeal process and make a formal case.

If you lose the formal case, there is one last opportunity—by filing an appeal with the Property Tax Appeal Board.