

## Coal helps boost assessment rolls

WAYNESBURG — The assessed value of all properties in Greene County increased about 4 percent this year primarily as a result of growth in the value of coal.

"We've had some really good growth in coal," said H. John Frazier, the county's chief assessor. "There's been a considerable increase in coal values this cycle."

The increase in coal values can be attributed to companies changing the status of their coal from reserve to active. Active coal, coal expected to be mined soon, is assessed at a higher value than reserve coal, Frazier explained.

The total assessed value of all properties in the county increased by about \$62 million to \$1.57 billion. Of that increase, about \$49.4 million is from coal.

The new assessment values have been sent to all municipalities. Township and borough officials use the figures to calculate how much property tax revenue to expect as they prepare their budgets.

Assessment values, however, can change within a matter of years as coal is made active or as it is mined, or depleted, and removed from the tax rolls.

"I always warn the municipalities and school districts, these values can fluctuate," Frazier said. "Within a couple of years, (values) can change dramatically."

As is true most years, some municipalities are winners, and others are losers.

Franklin Township is among the winners, seeing an increase in its total assessed value of about \$28 million, a 9 percent jump. Frazier attributed most of the increase to the addition of new active coal north of Waynesburg for the Emerald Mine.

Morris Township also saw an increase in value of about \$16 million, or 14 percent, because of the addition of active coal for Consol Energy's Bailey and Enlow Fork mines.

"We're in pretty good shape financially," said Franklin Township supervisor Reed Kiger, citing the increase in the value of coal as well as land improvements. Of the \$28 million increase in value, about \$25 million was attributed to coal.

"We're taking advantage of it while we can and are keeping our millage rate the same," Kiger said. He also said he believes coal will continue to play a large role in the township's valuation for at least the next few years.

"Inevitably it will be gone," he said. "Right now, I have no way of knowing how long it will last."

Richhill Township benefited from coal for a number of years. This year, however, it registered a decline in total value of about \$9.6 million, or 7 percent, primarily because of coal depletion.

The township always knew eventually coal would be gone, supervisor Douglas Grim said.

"We knew long ago that we needed to plan for it," he said. "We have budgeted conservatively, and we've put money back for the lean times," he said.

The township still benefits from the having the Bailey and Enlow Fork mines' main complex in the township and from imposing an earned income tax on out-of-state workers employed at the facility, Grim said.

Other municipalities that will see a decline in value, primarily from coal depletion, are Center Township, which will see a \$4.7 million, or about a 5 percent, decline in value; and Jefferson Township, which had a \$3.2 million decline in value, representing about 4 percent.

On the school district level, Central Greene School District should see the largest increase in assessed value, amounting to about \$37.8 million.

"The preliminary numbers look good, and it could be helpful for us when we deal with next year's budget," said Debbie Crouse, district business manager.

The district, which doesn't pass a budget until June, will receive its final assessment figures from the assessment office in February. The district will wait until then to see where it stands, Crouse said.

West Greene School District also saw an increase in value of about \$19 million. Though coal values declined in Richhill Township, the district saw increased coal values from Jackson, Gilmore and Aleppo townships.