New Treasurer's Delinquent Tax System Proves to be a Success

The Oakland County Treasurer's Office and the Department of Information Technology are continuing a longtime partnership that began in 1969. That was the year that newly-elected Treasurer C. Hugh Dohany commissioned the first automation effort for his office, declaring that "It is time for us to move into the twentieth century."

By 1997, it became apparent that it was time for us (Treasurer's Office and Information Technology) to prepare to move into the twenty-first century. The replacement of the existing Treasurer's System was dictated by a combination of new business mandates and new technological capabilities. On the one hand, the property tax administration has been complicated and expanded by several new requirements that include delinquent tax revolving funds, county collections of personal property taxes, Michigan Tax Tribunal assessment changes, tax abatements, and the sweeping changes dictated by 1994's Proposal A. On the technology side, the County's move toward a client server environment provides the opportunity for more user-friendly screens, immediate access to more information, and fewer restrictions on retention of historical data.

The Land Systems Team at Information Technology, led by the Supervisor of Systems Development Bob Olko, developed the Treasurer's Delinquent Tax System (DTXO). The success of this project was a direct result of the efforts of several key individuals. Those individuals were Francis Zak, Ronnie Cao, and Chandra Baalu from Information Technology, Jim VanLeuven, Cassie Patterson, Barb Navarre, Julie Casanova, Sue Danhausen, and Lydia White from the Treasurer's Office, several outside contractors, and the project sponsor, Pat Dohany, Chief Deputy County Treasurer.

Implemented in December 1997, the Delinquent Tax System provides for the complete administration of property tax collections. The workings of the system begin with the returns of delinquent taxes by local unit treasurers and runs through final disposition, either by payment or sale of the property. The system also generates bills and receipts for certain special assessments. It supports a unit dedicated to pro-actively enforcing the collection of delinquent personal property taxes.

The system replaces a computer system installed more than twenty years ago. It has also been designed to incorporate many manual processes that have grown around changing requirements of the County Treasurer function.

All functions of the Delinquent Tax Section have been addressed and incorporated into a comprehensive system that serves current needs while eliminating redundant functions, data, and reporting mechanisms. The results of all processes are captured as transactions. The transaction data provides flexibility in reporting, as well as audit trails. All mandated reports are included. In addition, an Internet link allows title companies nearly immediate preparation and delivery of delinquent property tax statements; the link is positioned to support enhanced access for a wider range of

clientele. The system automatically prepares and forwards posting activity and all check requests to the County's accounting system.

At its inception, some two and one half million records were converted from mainframe systems. More than one hundred programs enable the Treasurer to process over 50,000 receipts, 200,000 statements, and 10,000 property tax adjustments each year.

"The new system is really an improvement over the old Deltax system," says Chief of Tax Administration Jim VanLeuven. "It allows us to serve the public much more efficiently, and since its installation we are able to pursue our long standing goal of making tax information more accessible to the public."

Is Your Home Computer Immune From the Y2K bug?

Corporate America is hustling to tackle the Year 2000 problem in their own computer systems. But the computer you use at work isn't the only machine vulnerable to the bug; your home PC may be in just as much trouble.

To ensure that your home computer can handle Year 2000, do the following:

1. Set the date on your computer to Jan. 1, 2000.
2. Check that the date has been set.
3. Switch off the computer.
4. Wait a few minutes.
5. Switch the computer back on.
6. Check the date. If your computer doesn't show Jan. 1, 2000, you may have a problem.
7. Don't forget to reset your computer to the correct date and time.
8. Upgrade your hardware and software. If you can't, call the manufacturers and find out if your versions of hardware or software are Year 2000 compliant.

Use Caution When Creating GroupWise Rules

The GroupWise "Rules" feature has been a great asset to the electronic mail system. It allows the user to reply to each mail message sent to them when they are on vacation or away from their office for long periods of time. Unfortunately, when the rules are used incorrectly they can wreak havoc on the network system. Please remember what

the main focus is when using rules - to notify the sender that you are away from the office.

When creating a rule please make sure that you **Enable** the rule not **Run** the rule. When the rule is **Enabled** it will be automatically executed by an event (i.e., replying to a new unopened mail message, forwarding new unopened mail messages, etc.). When you **Run** the rule you are manually executing the rule which means the rule will be applied to each piece of mail in GroupWise which meets the criteria you have set up (i.e., reply to all incoming mail messages, whether they are opened or not, etc.). When **Run** is applied to a rule the system could possibly respond to each message in your GroupWise mailbox.

Please use caution when creating rules. You will want to think about what the rule will do while you are creating it. If you are creating a rule for incoming unopened mail sent to you while you are on vacation please follow the guidelines listed below:

- **Rule Name -** Type in a rule name you can easily identify (i.e., Vacation).
- **When Event Is -** Select **New Item**. *You will want this rule to apply to only new items you receive while you are away from the office.*
- **If Item Type Is -** Select which item you want the rule to apply to. Typically you will select all items (Mail, Appointment, Task, Note, and Phone).
- **Misc Values** (under If Item Type Is) -
  - ✓ **Item Status**, select:

    Not Opened (any new mail not opened)

    Not Completed (any new Tasks not completed)

    Conflicting Appointments (any new Appointments which are conflicting)

    Not Conflicting Appointments (any new Appointments which are not conflicting)

    Not Accepted (any new Task, Note, and Appointment not accepted)
  - ✓ **Sender Priority,** select:

    Low, **Normal**, and **High**
- **Then Actions Are -**
  - ✓ **Reply**, select:

    Reply to Sender only not Reply to all (Sender and Recipients). If you reply to all this will slow down the network. The intention should be to only reply to the person who is attempting to set up the meeting or sending the message.

    Message - Type a message that tells the sender when you will return and who they should contact if it's an emergency and can't wait until you return. Also, include the statement that the message they sent will automatically be discarded after 7 days and should be resent after you return if they want you to see it.

For additional information please refer to the Introduction to GroupWise 4.1 manual you received during training. You can also look on the County-Wide publish drive "O", specifically "o:\infotech\training\rules.grp". Excerpts from the Introduction to GroupWise 4.1 manual have been added for your convenience. This documentation was created in WordPerfect; therefore, please feel free to open, view, and print the file as needed. If you have any questions or problems please feel free to contact the Software Help Desk at 858-8812 between 8:30a.m. to 5:00p.m., Monday through Friday.

Logging Calls to the Help Desk System

Since implementation of the **QMail** component of the Q-Support Help Desk System in July 1997 approximately 160 calls have been automatically logged through GroupWise to Q-Support. **QMail** was designed to integrate Q-Support with GroupWise to provide the following functionality:

- Customers can log help desk calls directly into Q-Support. This eliminates the need to telephone the help desk(s) with **non-urgent** calls. Any urgent call should still be placed by telephone to allow expedient resolution of the problem. The call will automatically be converted and logged in Q-Support. After the call has been received, either the Hardware or Software help desk will contact the customer for any additional information in processing the call, if needed.

- Customers can receive a receipt of call number and initial status through GroupWise. The help desk staff has the ability to automatically send a response from Q-Support to the customer which identifies the call number and comments with regard to the call. The customer will receive the response through a GroupWise mail message.

- Help Desk and support staff can resolve calls where necessary via GroupWise e-mail. An example would be: if a customer calls to ask how to compact and repair an Access Database, the Q-Support system already contains step-by-step instructions which allow staff to walk the customer through the process over the phone. With **QMail**, the help desk and support staff can automatically e-mail the instructions from Q-Support to the customer and they can walk through the steps at their convenience.

Many individuals have found that it is more convenient to log calls electronically than calling the help desk and quite possibly be put on hold while other calls are being handled. For non-urgent calls it is often the simplest way of communicating problems with their PCs or software questions. There are, however, a few things customers will need to think about when logging help desk calls electronically.

Please remember that the system will only be able to record information in the message area of the e-mail as well as who the sender is. You will need to clearly communicate the problem and all pertinent information in the message area. Occasionally, customers have logged calls electronically with forwarded messages or attachments. When the

help desk staff review the call in the Q-Support system they only see the text <WP Attachment Enclosed> along with the name of the customer logging the call. The help desk staff must then contact the customer and ask them what the attachment was and what the problem is.
If you would like to send a help desk call electronically please follow the steps below:

To Send a Help Desk Call via GroupWise E-Mail:

1. Open **GroupWise**.
2. Select **Send...New Mail**.
3. Type **QDAEMON** in the **To:** text box.
   or
   Select **Address**, select the **HelpDesk** last name, and select **OK**.
4. Type **New Help Desk Call** in the **Subject:** text box.
5. In the **Message:** text box, include the following information:
   a. Your telephone number. (If you are reporting a call for someone else you will need to include the individual's name and telephone number as well.)
   b. The time you can be reached.
   c. The PC tag #.
   d. The location of the PC/printer/etc. (address/building/floor/room #)
   e. The description of the problem. The more specific you can be the better. Things to think about,
      - has the problem happened before;
      - can you still work on the PC;
      - have you or someone else installed any software on the PC;
      - has the PC been moved;
      - is anyone else in your area having the same problem;
      - if it's an error message, you will need to record the exact message and the results of any selections you make while clearing the error message;
      - what application are you working in;

- what feature are you working with in the application; and
- any other information that could be helpful.

6. Do NOT include Attachments or Forwarded messages. *The Q-Support system cannot read this area of the e-mail message.*
7. Select **Send**.
8. The message will be sent and logged into Q-Support.

If you have any problems sending a help desk call through GroupWise please contact the Software Help Desk at 858-8812.

How Not to Use E-Mail

If you are not careful about the use of e-mail, you could harm your career. E-mail is quickly becoming a primary means of communication. You should know when to use it and when not to use it. Here are some tips:

1. **Don't use e-mail to deliver bad news.** It's difficult to demonstrate your concern or compassion about bad news. Sometimes it's better to deliver this kind of information personally.

2. **Don't challenge a coworker's idea in an e-mail.** Criticism delivered via e-mail can be deadly to any relationship. If you've got ideas on how a coworker can improve a project, talk it out in person. They'll be less likely to put a negative interpretation on your offers to help.

3. **Don't hash out conflicts through e-mail.** If you have a conflict with a coworker or boss, it's always best to work things out in person. This allows for conversational give and take as well as an easier way to respond to one another.

4. **Don't delay responses to e-mail.** The technology is there so it can make communication faster. Even if you can't respond to a question or request right away, send an e-mail saying you'll work on the request. Also keep in mind that if an e-mail doesn't require a response, you shouldn't feel compelled to send one.

5. **Don't copy people unless necessary.** Otherwise, you'll get the reputation of being a source of junk e-mail.

6. **Don't write long messages.** Or, keep items in bullet form. E-mail should be quickly and easily read and comprehended.

7. **Don't get lazy with style or grammar.** Edit your work.

Information Technology Training Center Quarterly Update

The 1998 fourth quarter training schedule is now available on the County-Wide publish drive "O", specifically "**o:\infotech\training\schedule.doc**". If you cannot find a class listed on the schedule which you need to take, or the dates and times are not convenient for you, please contact the receptionist (858-0810) at Information Technology. Your name can be placed on a waiting list. When any class has a waiting list of six or more individuals, Information Technology will attempt to open an additional class.

Please note that we have offered only one Advanced Lotus 1-2-3 v. 5.0 class during the months of October, November and December 1998. The class date is December 7th through 9th. Due to lack of interest, we will not offer this class on future schedules; however, we will add it on an as needed basis. The Advanced Lotus class is geared to the student who has a need for advanced spreadsheet capabilities such as linking and combining files, understanding and using database features, finding solutions, understanding and using macros, using What-if tables, and using advanced @ functions.

Also, beginning in November, several classes will be held at the Administrative Annex I building in Emergency Management. The Administrative Annex I building and Information Technology share the same parking lot. As many of you will remember this is the same building in which Information Technology (Computer Services) was previously located. Due to limited space, we have had no other option but to relocate one training room to another location. The confirmation letter you receive will indicate which location your training will be held. We are sorry for any inconvenience that this may cause you.

Year 2000 Issues Using Lotus 1-2-3

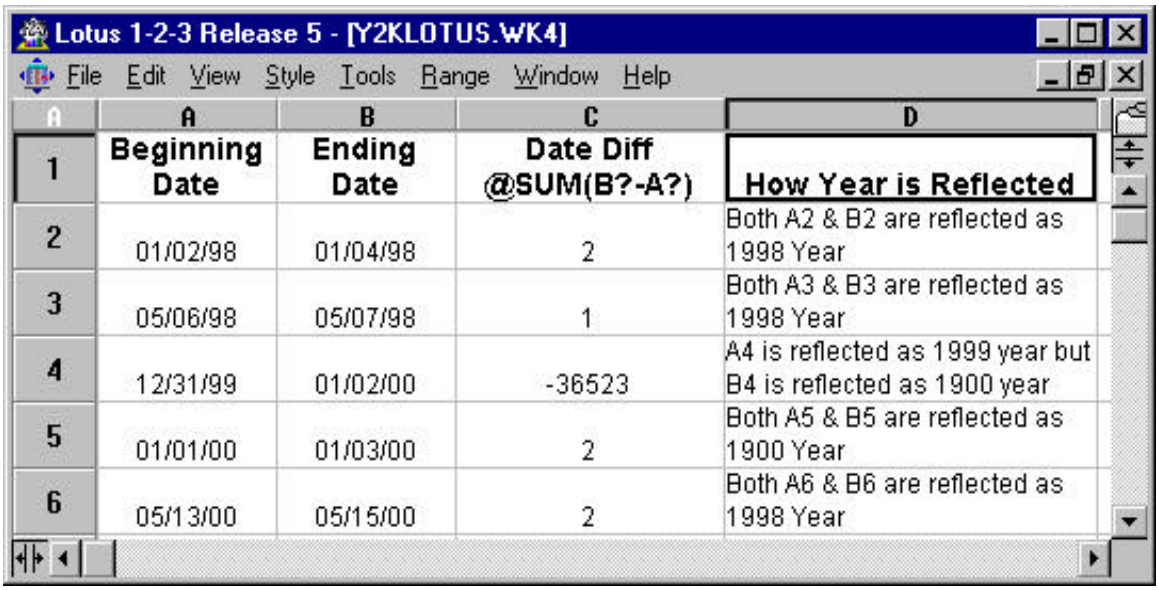
When creating Lotus spreadsheets you will need to keep in mind what will happen to your data when the year 2000 comes. Lotus is primarily used to track statistics and, quite frequently, those statistics will include dates. Below we have attempted to recreate some common scenarios which could potentially cause problems with your statistics in the year 2000. If you use Lotus to track date difference statistics or add a number of days to a specific date you will need to keep the following information in mind:

Example #1 - You maintain a spreadsheet in which you track beginning dates and ending dates and you need to know how many days fall between these two dates. A scenario might be that it is your responsibility to track how many days a patient has

been in treatment for billing purposes. One option would be to create a formula which subtracts the ending date from the beginning date.

The worksheet below (**Figure #1**) has beginning dates in column A and ending dates in column B. In column C a date difference function was created to find the number of days between column A and column B. If you look at cell A2 the beginning date is 01/02/98 and the ending date in cell B2 is 01/04/98. In cell C2 the correct date difference is 2 days. This is because both cells (A2 and B2) are reflected as 1998 years. However, if you look at row 4 the results in cell C4 are completely different than what you would expect. Cell A4 is 12/31/99 and cell B4 is 01/02/00 (you are inferring that the date is 01/02/2000). The date difference in cell C4 is -36523. This is because Lotus is using the 1900 date for cell B4 (01/02/1900). Can you see how your statistics could be skewed?

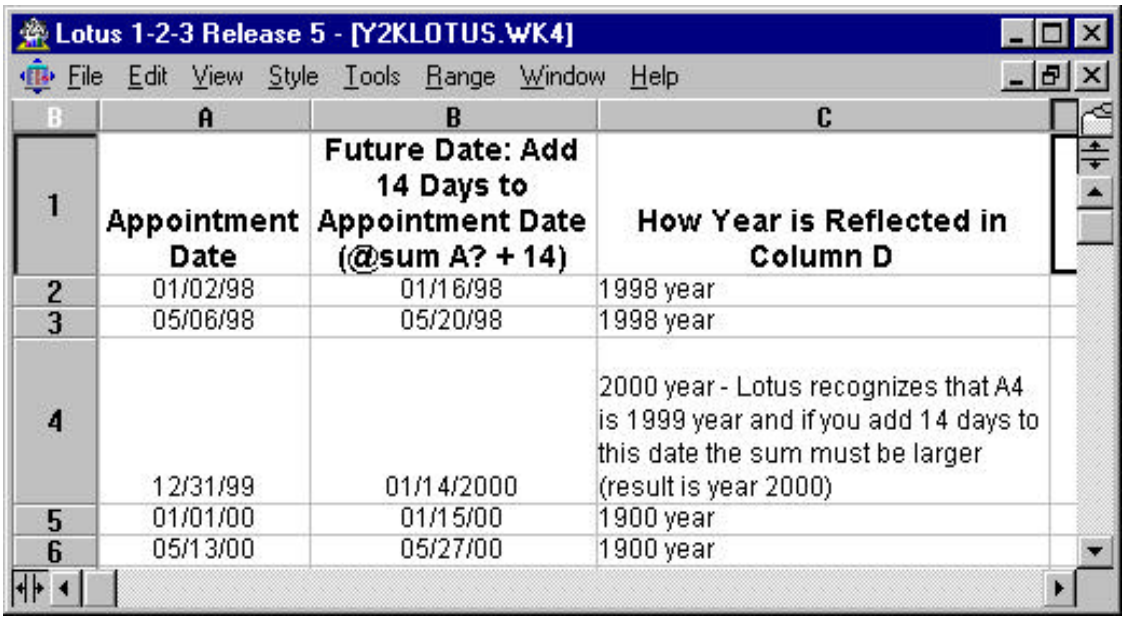
Figure #1



	A	B	C	D
1	Beginning Date	Ending Date	Date Diff @SUM(B?-A?)	How Year is Reflected
2	01/02/98	01/04/98	2	Both A2 & B2 are reflected as 1998 Year
3	05/06/98	05/07/98	1	Both A3 & B3 are reflected as 1998 Year
4	12/31/99	01/02/00	-36523	A4 is reflected as 1999 year but B4 is reflected as 1900 year
5	01/01/00	01/03/00	2	Both A5 & B5 are reflected as 1900 Year
6	05/13/00	05/15/00	2	Both A6 & B6 are reflected as 1998 Year

Example #2 - The same holds true when adding dates without using the century format (1900, 1989, 2001). You maintain an appointment spreadsheet in which you record appointment dates and then use a formula to compute a future date. A scenario might be that it is your responsibility to track when a followup visit with a patient should occur. In this case, the patient must come back in two weeks. One option would be to create a formula which adds 14 days to the last appointment date. When looking at the spreadsheet below (**Figure #2**) the dates in column B appear correct; however, the last two rows (5 and 6) are really 1900 dates not 2000 dates. Keep in mind that Lotus is not year 2000 compliant; therefore, the dates in cell A5, A6, B5, and B6 are 1900 dates. Again, this could potentially skew any statistics you are maintaining.

Figure #2



Lotus 1-2-3 Release 5 - [Y2KLOTUS.WK4]

File Edit View Style Tools Range Window Help

	A	B	C
1	Appointment Date	Future Date: Add 14 Days to Appointment Date (@sum A? + 14)	How Year is Reflected in Column D
2	01/02/98	01/16/98	1998 year
3	05/06/98	05/20/98	1998 year
4	12/31/99	01/14/2000	2000 year - Lotus recognizes that A4 is 1999 year and if you add 14 days to this date the sum must be larger (result is year 2000)
5	01/01/00	01/15/00	1900 year
6	05/13/00	05/27/00	1900 year

The only way you will be assured that the dates are year 2000 compliant is to begin using the four digit year code versus letting the system automatically assign the century date. Please keep the above information in mind as we approach the year 2000.

Microsoft Access and the Year 2000

Until recently, computer resources such as memory and hard drive space were an expensive consideration. In order to conserve these resources, computer programmers made certain concessions when designing many of the applications we use today. One of these concessions was to shorten four digit year representations (1998) to two digits (98). Many believed that when the year 2000 and beyond became a consideration, their applications would have long been replaced. Although most software companies replace their applications with new versions about every 18 months, there is still underlying code which may not be Y2K (Year 2000) compliant.

Microsoft Access has gone through several versions since it was originally introduced, and yet even with the newest version, Access can still produce applications that are not Y2K compliant. This is not entirely the burden of Access itself. The designer of the database must also take into account the special considerations of data posted from multiple centuries.

There are situations when Y2K compliancy is not a concern. If your database merely displays records in a table, form or report, Y2K compliancy is not a necessary consideration. You may want to implement some sort of compliancy anyway for future use. Most databases, however, contain sorts, comparisons and expressions that demand careful consideration of how dates are entered.

When a date field is formatted with a two digit year, Access will always assume that the preceding digits are 19. The compliancy issue can be resolved if the client is required to enter a four digit year, however, this introduces productivity issues as well as the need for clients to retrain themselves. Additionally, if, in a four digit year field the year is entered as two digits, Access will assume that the preceding digits are 19. Caution is also required if you are converting a table with two digit years to four digits. Access will precede all two digit years with 19, regardless of the intended century. Please be sure to make a back-up copy of your database before attempting to make any changes.

As we move towards the twenty-first century, we will need to explore options to make existing Access databases year 2000 compliant. Look for more articles on Year 2000 in future newsletters.

