

Minnesota

Property taxes take smaller jump

State officials say levy limits have put brakes on steep hikes

By Bill Salisbury
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Revenue Department reported Wednesday.

Property taxes will increase next year in Minnesota, but they won't grow as fast as they have in recent years, the state

Real estate taxes will go up an average of 6.5 percent, or \$476 million, in 2009 if local governments adopt the levies they have proposed this fall,

the department said. This year's increase was 7.3 percent, and the average increase over the past three years is 8.1 percent.

Minnesota Revenue Commissioner Ward Einess attrib-

uted the slower rate of growth to the property tax levy limits that Gov. Tim Pawlenty and the Legislature imposed this year on cities and counties with populations over 2,500. That law caps property tax increases at 3.9 percent, adjusted for inflation, household growth and other factors.

Some special levies are exempt from that limit.

"The property tax cap is helping to keep a lid on local government spending, and Minnesota taxpayers are seeing the benefit," Einess said in a news release.

PROPERTY TAXES, 6B >

Afton

Peter Vujovich, the builder behind Afton's Un-development, is applying sustainable building concepts to his new home, including geothermal heating, recycled floors and a rainwater collection system.



PIONEER PRESS PHOTOS: JOHN DOMAN

Peter Vujovich feeds treats Wednesday to Vinnie, one of two horses living on his 15-acre Idea Farm in Afton. Top: His house, which is under construction, will showcase the latest environmentally conscious building techniques. He's hoping some of the ideas catch on with future clients.

His home will make you see GREEN

By Joe Peters
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In a trailer beside a dirt road leading to his latest creation in Afton, Peter Vujovich grabs a legal pad and sketches out three intersecting circles.

One represents long-lasting building techniques, another represents beautiful architecture and the third represents green, sustainable practices. Together they form Vujovich's philosophy.

Up the road, that philosophy is coming to life at a place called the Idea Farm. The 15-acre farm will be Vujovich's home but also a spot

where others can see what's possible.

"It's built to showcase all the green ideas that I think are ready," Vujovich said. "We really want to be connected to this Earth."

Here is some of what makes the Idea Farm green:

- 2,000 pounds of tree seeds were planted.
- Barn wood was recycled for floors in the house.
- 10 acres of native grass was replanted.
- Toilets and faucets are low-volume.

IDEA FARM, 12B >

Minnesota > Politics

Bachmann claims TV remarks 'an urban legend'



Legislator confronted on Fox News show

By Andy Barr
Politico

A month after calling for an investigation of fellow members of Congress to "find out if they are

pro-America or anti-America," Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., claims the whole episode is "an urban legend."

Asked about the comment Tuesday night on Fox News' "Hannity

To see video of Bachmann's interview on "Hardball" and her Tuesday appearance on "Hannity & Colmes," go to twincities.com.

& Colmes," Bachmann said, "That's not what I said at all."

"You've said you were concerned

during the campaign that Obama had anti-American views. You said the news media should do a penetrating exposé and take a look at the views of the people in Congress and find out if they're pro- or anti-America," host Alan Colmes said.

BACHMANN COMMENTS, 6B >

St. Paul City Council

Proposal to power recycler wins OK

Rock-Tenn could end up harnessing rural biogas facility

By Tad Vezner
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The St. Paul City Council voted unanimously Wednesday to accept community recommendations to allow the Rock-Tenn paper plant to explore building a rural biogas facility to power its operation.

Rock-Tenn, a century-old St. Paul paper recycling plant with 500 employees earning high-paying union wages, faces an uncertain future after losing a source of cheap thermal energy because Xcel Energy replaced its coal-burning High Bridge plant with a facility fired by natural gas.

Under the proposal from the St. Paul Port Authority and the Rock-Tenn Community Advisory Panel, that energy could end up being replaced by a biogas facility, possibly using ethanol byproducts, built outside the metro area.

ROCK-TENN PLANT, 4B >

St. Paul

Police get fresh crack at cold cases

Federal grant will help unit use new DNA technology

By Mara H. Gottfried
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Eleven retired police investigators — with a combined 300-plus years of experience as St. Paul officers — gathered Wednesday for a "meeting of the minds" on cold homicide cases in St. Paul.

It was the first time all the investigators were together for a new St. Paul police unit aiming to solve old homicides with new DNA technology. The unit is funded with a nearly \$260,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice.

Many expressed the same sentiment about why they wanted to be part of the unit.

"I really think a cold-case unit is a victim's last chance for justice," said Michael Toronto, who commanded the department's homicide unit from 2001 until he retired in 2002. "They deserve and they demand justice. Someone's got to work for the victim."

COLD CASES, 5B >

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