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FAIR VALUE

The big fish in tax challenges: Empire Tax Reductions

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If assessment challenging were baseball, then Peter Cohen and Claire Gangi would be the Yankees.

The two run one of the largest and most successful property-tax-consulting companies in the nation.

As co-presidents of Empire Tax Reductions, they've dominated the tax-appeal business on Long Island for years. More recently, they dove into the Westchester and Rockland markets with a massive direct-mail marketing campaign, said Gangi, who works out of the company's Tarrytown office.

In 2011, she said, they've filed 3,850 challenges in Westchester alone.

Gangi admits her marketing campaigns have been "aggressive" and says they're a large reason for her success.

She and Cohen split most of the Lower Hudson Valley; they also cover White Plains, Yonkers, Eastchester and Greenburgh through a different company called Assessment Correction Group. For the company, Cohen is president and Gangi is vice president.

Gangi said they charge clients 50 percent to 60 percent of the first year's savings. They also might charge a \$30 valuation fee and a \$30 filing fee if the case goes to the appeal stage.

Cohen said a lot of his clients are overassessed because of inequities in the system that often favor



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PETER COHEN

the challenger.

"Their hands are tied in New York state," he said.

Among ACG's recent accomplishments was winning a state appellate court decision finding against the Clarkstown, Orange town and Ramapo assessors, who had demanded the right to see the interior of homes where the companies had filed tax appeals. The

court cited the Fourth Amendment, which prohibits unreasonable searches.

With the system tilted in favor of the challengers and the demand to decrease taxes showing no signs of slowing, Cohen said he expects the tax-appeals trend — and the resulting inequities within each local tax base — to continue.

"The more people that file, the more people that have to file," he said.

He argues the solution to the region's crushing taxes will have to come from the government itself.

"The only reason for everyone's taxes to go down is to stop spending so much money," he said.