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Moffat County's 1st female assessor reflects on service

For 24 years, a certain plain and slightly dusty item has rested on Suzanne Brinks' desk in the Moffat County Assessor's office.

That item is her nameplate — the same one she received when she was hired in 1987 as an entry-level transfer clerk under then-assessor Dennis Shanahan.

But, through the years, unlike the plaque, the woman behind it has changed significantly.

She went from that entry-level clerk to become the first female assessor in Moffat County history.

On Tuesday, however, the 61-year-old Brinks and her nameplate will no longer reside in the assessor's office located in the Moffat County Courthouse.

Brinks, who is term-limited as assessor, will be replaced by current county treasurer Robert Razzano.

But, Brinks said she'll take the nameplate with her to remember her time in the office that she loves.

"I'm going to steal county property," she said with a laugh. "Maybe I'll put it on my mailbox."

Four years after being hired in the assessor's office, Brinks was named deputy assessor, taking over the office's administrative work and continuing to value commercial and personal property for county tax purposes.

Brinks worked under Shanahan for more than a decade until Colorado voters established term limits and he left office. Brinks took office in 2003 after an unopposed campaign.

“I don’t think anybody would say, ‘Oh, when I grow up I want to be the assessor,’” she said. “It is what they call an accidental occupation.”

When asked how it would feel to not come to work Tuesday, Brinks was at a loss.

“I am looking forward to retiring and having time to do the things I like to do,” she said. “I am going to miss working with all of the people in this office. I’m sure I’ll miss this job — it has been a passion.”

When Brinks took office, one of her main goals, she said, was to concentrate on state assessed value of property in the county, which makes up about 44 percent of the county’s tax base.

“I wanted to concentrate on making sure that those valuations were accurate,” she said. “I went to several special classes on the valuation of state assessed properties and actually did protest a few years to the division of property tax, who does value all public utilities.”

One of her achievements during her career, she said, was helping hire Visual Lease Services to find omitted oil and gas properties in the county and fairly assess them.

“I started going out in the field and looking at oil and gas properties, and I realized that I didn’t have the experience to do that,” she said. “I’d go out there and didn’t know what I was looking at.”

She said the omitted property found by Visual Lease Services in the county since 2002 totals about \$22 million, which equates to about \$500,000 in revenues for the county’s taxing districts.

Over the years, Brinks said she finds the same thing in each new employee hired at her office — they either love the work or hate it.

“If you love it, you stay here and it does become a passion,” she said. “You want to do a good job in the office to value property fairly across the board, and it is

very challenging and it is a difficult position. We take a lot of abuse.”

One of the things Brinks said she struggled with during her time in office was helping residents upset by their taxes understand the assessor’s duties, which she said can be difficult at times.

But, the challenges of the office never stopped Brinks from enjoying her job.

“We have a lot of fun in this office,” she said. “We try to take things in stride and try to let it roll off your back. It’s difficult.”

But, with a box of office items packed into the corner and her office partly cleaned out, Brinks said it has been good to serve Moffat County in the capacity she could.

“That is what we are charged with doing and it is not always an easy job, but if anybody ever came in and had a problem with their value, we went out and

inspected it, and that's what we are required to do," she said.

"I'm proud of the job that I have done."