



# **NEWS**

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## **STATE EMPLOYEES HONORED FOR INNOVATIVE IDEAS** *Florida TaxWatch Honors Those Who Save Taxpayers Money*

**TALLAHASSEE** — You many never have heard of Mohammad Amirzadeh (Moh-ha-mad Ah-meer-za-day) and Raghib Qureshi (Rah-heeb Ku-reh-shee), but if you ever get caught in a weather emergency in Florida, you will benefit from their hard-work and devotion to their jobs with the Florida Department of Management Services. And should you be lucky enough to never find yourself in such a situation, you still benefit from their innovative work, which saved Florida taxpayers more than \$500,000.

When the Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Systems needed standardized routing of wireless calls statewide, this two-member team helped integrate several technologies under the state's SUNCOM communications network. Their solution allows someone anywhere in Florida's 67 counties to use their mobile phone to find specific local help, saving money and improving citizen information on emergency evacuation and financial assistance, food, shelter, childcare, jobs, and crisis hotlines.

Their dedication and ingenuity that resulted in significant cost-savings to the State of Florida earned them a 2008 Prudential Financial - Davis Productivity Award at the 20th Anniversary Dinner & Gala held this week in Tallahassee.

The two-member team was one of 51 award winning individuals and teams (mostly from the Big Bend) receiving recognition for a job well done, along a handshake from Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp, Chair of the Prudential Financial - Davis Productivity Awards and other state officials at the event Tuesday night.

The Prudential - Davis Productivity Awards program is a major government improvement initiative chaired by Lt. Governor Kottkamp, administered by Florida TaxWatch, and sponsored by Florida TaxWatch, The Florida Council of 100, and the State of Florida. Cash awards of \$250 to \$2,500 plus commemorative plaques and certificates of commendation are presented annually to state employees who clearly exceed their job descriptions and performance expectations in ways that improve service delivery and save money for Florida taxpayers and businesses.

"For 20 years, this award has recognized the importance of rewarding and replicating the cost saving innovations generated throughout Florida by state employees like you. In highlighting your efforts, we assure all Floridians that their government is providing the high quality services they deserve at the lowest possible cost to them as taxpayers," the Lt. Governor told the audience of 600 state employees,

their bosses and other dignitaries. "On behalf of Governor Crist and the 19 million people who call Florida home, thank you for the exceptional work you do to improve the quality of life we all enjoy and for your dedication to our great state," he added before individually honoring the winners of the 51 individual and team awards given on Tuesday night at the Tallahassee-Leon County Civic Center.

Following an introduction to the event by co-Master of Ceremonies, former Lt. Governor Frank Brogan and Susan Pareigis, president of the Florida Council of 100, each award winner was welcomed on to the stage to be presented with their award and hardy congratulations from Lt. Governor Kottkamp and Dominic M. Calabro, president and CEO of Florida TaxWatch.

Speaking to the award winners, Calabro explained the significance of recognition to the winners. "Your dedication to your job, your profession, and to our state is an inspiration to all of us. Now, more than ever, I believe it is necessary that government be as efficient as we can be – and each one of you is a model of how we can improve government together," he said. Calabro also explained the value of the program to Florida taxpayers. "This partnership between the non-profit and business communities to recognize, reward, and replicate the innovative cost-avoidance and cost-savings ideas of exemplary state employees has saved more than \$6 billion for Florida's taxpayers since its inception in 1989."

Since 1989, more than 12,500 individuals, teams, work units and partnerships have been honored for producing more than \$6 billion worth of added value.

Florida's Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink presented the award for adapting and implementing a previous award winning achievement to Tom Coker, Bureau Chief at the Department of Business and Professional Regulation. He adapted a previously honored data management system from the Department of Transportation in order to streamline data processing at the DBPR, saving an estimated \$70,000 annually for Florida's taxpayers.

"The Prudential – Davis Productivity Awards program has saved billions by recognizing exceptional state employees, rewarding their contributions, and replicating cost-savings innovations throughout Florida government," Sink told the audience. "But most importantly, I know the value of these awards to the employees themselves. These awards are a tangible symbol of their commitment and dedication to their profession and their state. As a citizen and a state official, I thank and congratulate every one of the award winners, including the 38 winners from the Department of Financial Services, for their hard work and outstanding accomplishment."

The 2008 competition awarded 489 winners statewide for their innovations and productivity improvements worth \$332 million in cost savings, cost avoidances and increased revenue for state government. Other winners who were honored at Tuesday's gala include:

**Leanne Sztuk, Area Financial Manager**

**Office of Financial Regulation, West Palm Beach**

***(Distinguished Individual Awards – commemorative plaque and \$1,250 cash)***

Ms. Sztuk helped dismantle a stock boiler room network that preyed on victims nationwide. Her more than three years on the case helped convict nine brokers who were ordered to pay restitution of more than \$17 million. Her achievement was considered tops among the department's 49 examiners statewide.

**Steven Pilcher, Telecommunications Consultant**

**Department of Law Enforcement, Tallahassee**

***(Notable Individual Award - commemorative plaque and \$400 cash)***

Mr. Pilcher saved approximately \$83,000 over vendors' costs by: (a) designing and fabricating a mobile platform that responds to domestic security and child abduction incidents; and (b) by constructing a cutting- edge audio/video enhancement facility. Both initiatives strengthened investigative capabilities of the Tampa region, and the mobile platform is available for statewide deployment.

**Robert Lasko, Senior Contract Auditor  
Agency for Health Care Administration, Tallahassee**

***(Notable Individual Award - commemorative plaque and \$300 cash)***

Mr. Lasko identified 19 overpayments made to Medicaid providers because of their duplicate billing practices, thereby helping to recover \$1.3 million.

**The Antitrust Division  
Office of the Attorney General, Tallahassee**

***(Sustained Exemplary Performance Award – Eagle Statue Award)***

Since 1986, Antitrust Division staff have recovered more than \$215 million for consumers and as reimbursement for investigation and litigation costs. This equates to approximately \$1.2 million for each of the Division's employees. Monies recovered have come from prosecution of bid-rigging, price-fixing, and potentially anticompetitive mergers or monopolies. Florida has one of the most successful antitrust enforcement units in the country, and Florida's is one of the few units that are funded entirely by its own recoveries.

**Lemon Law Arbitration Program  
Office of the Attorney General, Tallahassee**

***(Sustained Exemplary Performance Award – Eagle Statue Award)***

The Lemon Law Arbitration Program was created in 1988 to provide an alternative dispute resolution procedure under the Motor Vehicle Warranty Enforcement Act. During the past two decades, the 17-member Lemon Law Arbitration team has enabled nearly 14,000 Florida consumers to receive \$362 million in arbitration awards and pre-hearing settlements, more than a ten to one cost-benefit ratio. The team's early efforts were recognized by a 1992 Davis Productivity Award.

The Lemon Law arbitration process has prompted time saving and cost-effective outcomes. Pre-hearing settlements of cases increased from 27.7% of approved cases in 1989, to 57.1% in 2005 and 60.2% in 2006. When consumers receive refunds through settlements, the cost of conducting arbitration hearings is avoided. For example, pre-hearing settlements eliminated operating costs of \$350,028 in 1991 and 1992. These annual savings helped prompt the 1992 Legislature to expand coverage for consumers while reducing revenue to fund the program by eliminating a \$50.00 arbitration filing fee. Florida is one of a very few states that offers used car buyers a searchable database for free to help- evaluate potential purchases.

**The Division of Animal Industry Incident Management Team  
Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services**

***(Notable Team, Work Unit, and Partnership Awards – commemorative plaque and \$500 cash)***

This statewide, 30-member team controlled Equine Herpes Virus, a fatal horse disease, during an outbreak in South Florida that helped avoid a potential \$100 million loss to the equine industry and Florida communities.

**The Unregistered Home Health Care Product Task Force,  
Department of Financial Services, Office of Insurance Regulation, Tallahassee and St. Petersburg**

***(Notable Team, Work Unit, and Partnership Awards – commemorative plaque and \$500 cash)***

This eight member team developed an investigation and subsequent litigation that resulted in a landmark legal decision that will protect elderly senior citizens from future sales of unregistered home health care look alike products. Similar product sales in the past five years resulted in over \$4,000,000.00 in sales that provided no services to senior citizens.

**The Northwest Regional Team, Bureau of Fire and Arson  
Department of Financial Services, Panama City**

***(Notable Team, Work Unit, and Partnership Awards – commemorative plaque and \$300 cash)***

This 15-member team investigated 100 intentionally set fires and achieved a 44% arrest rate, which was nearly two and a half times the national average. The team's efforts helped insurance companies recoup funds paid for repairs and settle mortgages for estimated added value of more than \$300,000.

Their achievements, and those of many other extraordinary state workers, are detailed in the "**2008 Prudential - Davis Productivity Awards**" magazine, released at the gala. Additionally, in recognition of

the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Prudential – Davis Productivity Awards program, another publication “***Celebrating the Top 20 Adaptable Achievements from the Prudential – Davis Productivity Awards***” was also released. Both publications are available from the Florida TaxWatch website at [www.FloridaTaxWatch.org/dpa](http://www.FloridaTaxWatch.org/dpa) or by clicking the links provided at the end of this release.

Prudential Financial is in its fifth year as Anchor Sponsor of the Davis Productivity Awards program. Their support is crucial for sustaining and growing this nationally unique initiative. Governor Charlie Crist and Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp have made leveraging the added value of award winning achievements by adapting them to other areas of state government a priority for building a more effective and efficient government. The Florida TaxWatch Adaptable Achievements on-line publication identifies more than 700 achievements from the past five years of winners that can create more than \$100 million worth of this added value within three years after full implementation.

Florida TaxWatch, The Council of 100, and the State of Florida will be honoring other award winners from across the state at regional luncheon ceremonies scheduled as follows:

- Monday, June 9th – Jacksonville
- Tuesday, June 10th – Gainesville
- Monday, June 16th – Tampa
- Tuesday, June 17th – Orlando
- Wednesday, June 18th – Miami

(MEDIA: Please note that we will be producing and distributing local news advisories in advance of each of these events with specific time/location information – and new releases with names of local winners and descriptions of the accomplishments and awards received. All winners are listed in the “***2008 Prudential - Davis Productivity Awards***” magazine – available now on [www.FloridaTaxWatch.org/dpa](http://www.FloridaTaxWatch.org/dpa) or by clicking the link provided at the end of this release.

(BROADCASTERS: The event began with a video celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Prudential - Davis Productivity Awards program and congratulating the award winners. The video includes messages from Lt. Governor Jeff Kottkamp, former Governor Wayne Mixson, Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink, Attorney General Bill McCollum, Michael A. Jennings, former Chairman of Florida TaxWatch and VP for Government Relations at Prudential (the Anchor Sponsor of the program), and Steve Evans, Chief Operating Officer – and former Chairman – of Florida TaxWatch. To view the full video online, visit [www.FloridaTaxWatch.org/dpa](http://www.FloridaTaxWatch.org/dpa).

**MEDIA NOTE: The 2008 Prudential Financial Davis Productivity Awards Magazine and Celebrating the Top 20 Adaptable Achievements from the Prudential – Davis Productivity Award can be found online at [www.FloridaTaxWatch.org/dpa](http://www.FloridaTaxWatch.org/dpa). Pictures from the event in Tallahassee are also available for download and publication at [www.FloridaTaxWatch.org/dpa](http://www.FloridaTaxWatch.org/dpa).**

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Florida TaxWatch is a statewide, non-profit, non-partisan research institute that over its 29 year history has become widely recognized as the watchdog of citizens' hard-earned tax dollars. Its mission is to provide the citizens of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and education on government revenues, expenditures, taxation, public policies and programs and to increase the productivity and accountability of Florida state and local government. Its support comes from homeowners and retirees, small and large businesses, philanthropic foundations, and professional associations. On the web at [www.FloridaTaxWatch.org](http://www.FloridaTaxWatch.org).