

FROM THE BOOKKEEPER

By Pam VanLoon, RHAGP Bookkeeper

I get so many calls with questions because many are confused about various aspects of their billing or account information, so I thought I would try to clear up some of the confusion.

When you come in to our office to purchase, you receive an **INVOICE**. (We also include one if you have an order sent by mail) If you pay what is due at that time, your invoice will either be stamped "**PAID**" or it may be printed out with PAID on it, depending on how the person helping you has handled your payment. Otherwise, you will have **CHARGED** the amount to your account. If this is the case, and you don't send in payment **before** the end of the month, you will receive a **STATEMENT**. Your **STATEMENT** lists all open (unpaid) invoices. When you receive your statement your obligation is to **PAY THE TOTAL AMOUNT DUE**.

We have some members who do not pay when they get their statements; in fact I've had some tell me they don't even bother to open mail from us. This is not good. When your account is not paid, you will receive several past due notes and letters. If you continue unpaid, you will receive a collection warning. Your account will be locked so you cannot buy forms or run tenant screening. If you ignore the collection warning, you will be sent to collections. We are a non-profit association and cannot afford to carry those who choose not to pay their bills.

Another issue I get a lot is people calling about their tenant screening invoices. We do not mail these out unless you call and request them; we can e-mail, fax or mail them. (E-Bill members **DO** get theirs e-mailed automatically). In the past, the tenant screening has been billed the month following, but starting in March, they are being invoiced daily as they are run. This will make it more accurate; errors can be caught more quickly and we may avoid some of the next issue I see a lot, which is:

I get a lot of phone calls from people saying "I didn't screen this person, I don't recognize the name". On occasion, this is correct; the person in

the office who ran the report inadvertently ran it under the wrong member number. But 99% of the time I go unlock the file, pull the screening report and lo and behold the signature is that of the person who doesn't remember doing the screening. When you screen people, you should be keeping strict track of **WHO** you screen and **WHEN**. This should be kept in a file with the applications and signed copies of the screening authorization. Again, many people tell me they don't do this, or that they have **NO** file system set up. You are a business; you **MUST** have a system in place in case you are hit with a **FAIR HOUSING** violation or an IRS audit. I also get calls requesting which rental unit/address the screening was under. There is no way for me to know, you are responsible for that information.

Another issue I see a lot is people calling and asking how much they spent with us over the last year. **AGAIN**, you **MUST** have a record keeping system in place as a business. If your tax return is audited, you **NEED** to be able to find this information. While I am able to provide this information, it takes time and it could have been avoided by having a good system in place. Either a paper ledger or a computer program such as Quicken or QuickBooks can help you. At the very least, **KEEP A PAPER FILE**. You should keep copies of all invoices and statements and make notes of when they were paid, how they were paid and check numbers if applicable. If you pay with a credit card we always send you a receipt. Put it in your file.

Hopefully these tips will help some of you. But remember, I am always happy to help you so don't hesitate to call me.

(Pam will be out for at least three weeks beginning March 28th, due to surgery, so we appreciate your patience during this time, you may have some delay in getting questions about your account answered, but you will be helped as soon as she is back. April statements will be dated through March 24th rather than the 31st as usual)