



San Bernardino County

Ensen Mason CPA, CFA • Auditor-Controller/Treasurer/Tax Collector



DOLLARS & SENSE

ATC Quarterly Newsletter

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July - August - September

Thinking Outside The Box...by Ensen Mason

Do you have a Flexible Spending Account (FSA)? Many of us do. They're nice in that they give us a tax-free way to pay for out of pocket health costs. Almost nobody can deduct medical costs, but if you have an FSA, you can. It's also nice to get a little help from the County, also, free of tax. However, FSAs have a really bad attribute. They have to be mostly spent by the end of the plan year (only \$550 can be rolled over). Why, I ask myself? If its purpose is to provide for healthcare costs, why should it matter if you incur the cost in June or July? Isn't there a better way?

I have been quietly advocating for a plan that includes Health Savings Accounts (HSAs). They are similar to FSAs with two important differences. One, there is no requirement that all or even any of the annual limit of \$7,200 be spent in any given year. Money can be accumulated until such a time when it's needed. Very handy as a retirement planning tool when most people will be paying a lot more for healthcare. In the meantime, it can be invested to grow. Many people could accumulate six figures to use as a buffer against high healthcare costs in retirement.

The second difference is it must be paired with a High Deductible Healthcare Plan (HDHP). This is a lower cost plan with higher out of pocket costs, which would be paid from the HSA. The savings from the cheaper plan can fund the HSA in-part or in-whole. It's a foreign concept for most people compared to what they're used to. I'll give you an example, but understand these numbers are made up and based on what I think might be a reasonable estimate.

Assume your family healthcare is funded at \$24,000 a year and your HDHP plan with a \$1,400 per person deductible costs \$16,800 a year. From that savings, you can put the annual limit of \$7,200 into an HSA. If an average family spends \$2,000 a year, \$5,500 is left to accumulate. According to the Vanguard calculator, after 30 years, you would have accumulated \$225,300. Obviously, results will vary widely depending on your medical needs, but everyone would come out a winner to some degree.

- Ensen

ATC EARNS RECORD AMOUNT OF NATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

ATC Ensen Mason and his staff have been recognized by the National Association of Counties (NACo) with a record five 2021 Achievement Awards – three in Information Technology, one in Financial Management, and one in County Administration and Management categories. The awards honor innovative, effective county government programs that strengthen services for residents.

The first of three 2021 awards in the Information Technology (IT) category recognized ATC for Arrowhead Regional Medical Center's SAP Inventory Management Module that fully automated their just-in-time system-driven process for handling warehouse inventory; the second one is for the Robotic Process Automation that programmatically interacts with the mainframe terminals and external database system to automatically process corrections, amend tax bills, and issue refunds in a fraction of the time required by traditional methods; and the third in the IT category is for the Tax Collector Kiosk Project that delivers an exceptional in-person payment experience and enables taxpayer access to current payment information before even visiting a cashier.

The fourth Achievement Award recognized ATC for its Process Server Checks Projects, a web application that enables ATC-Central Collections (CC) staff to automatically request checks and perform the necessary accounting functions. The application interfaces with SAP to issue warrants against a Treasury integrated bank account.

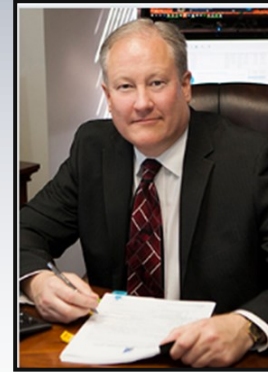
The fifth Achievement Award recognized ATC for the Payroll Electronic Document System (PEDS), that provides a safe, secure, and self-managed document solution, effectively streamlining the County's payroll document transfer process.

This record five 2021 awards builds on the foundation of two earned in 2020 and three in 2019. Ten national awards in three years represent a tremendous accomplishment. Prior to this, ATC had received a cumulative total of one NACo award earlier in this century with one additional award in 1990s.

Started in 1970, NACo's annual Achievement Awards program is designed to recognize county government innovations. Each nominee is judged on its own merits with awards given only to those nominees who provide substantial improvements in program quality and service delivery.



ATC Mason outside his office where the NACo Awards line the hallway of the Executive Office.



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ATC PROUD TO HOST SUPERVISOR BACA AND STAFF

ATC Ensen Mason was pleased to welcome Fifth District Supervisor Joe Baca, Jr. and his staff on April 14 for a tour of the ATC building and its operations. The tour commenced on the fourth floor with an inside look at Executive Management and the Administration Division followed by the Controller, Property Tax, Disbursements, and Internal Audits Divisions. The tour continued on the second floor with the Central Collections and SAP Center of Excellence Divisions and concluded on the first floor with the Tax Collector, Information Technology, and Treasurer Divisions. Supervisor Baca and his staff were personally greeted by each Division Chief and provided with an overview of the functions and services of each division.



Don Le, Chief Deputy, Information Technology explains the importance of an in-house IT Division as the role of technology and the need for modern government business practices expand.

Supervisor Baca was very appreciative of the time and effort ATC Mason and the Division Chiefs put forth to prepare for and provide a first class look at ATC operations. He was inquisitive with each Chief on how ATC's services benefit his constituents. He especially enjoyed viewing the Tax Collector remittance process first hand and the intricacies of the IT Data Center. ATC Mason discovered that he and Supervisor Baca have a shared prior experience with Central Collections involving an unpaid bill, and the Supervisor was pleased to hear about the improvements ATC Mason has made in operations there over the past two and a half years.

Supervisor Baca was formerly a teacher and State Assembly-member representing the 62nd District. He was joined on the ATC tour by Chief of Staff Ed Chavez, Special Assistant Channing Hawkins, Senior Administrative Analyst Tony Mejia, and Field Representative Kim Knaus.



Linda Santillano, Chief Deputy Property Tax explains the intricacies of Division functions to Supervisor Joe Baca Jr. and staff that impact all County taxpayers and over 600 local taxing agencies.

The tour was a great way to showcase the ATC Department as the financial foundation of San Bernardino County government.

ATC Mason welcomes Supervisor Joe Baca Jr. and his staff to the ATC building and provides a brief overview of the functions of the Administration Division.



Chief Deputy Tax Collector Diana Atkeson offers an inside look for Supervisor Baca and ATC Mason of an antique safe located inside the Tax Collector Lobby.

SPOTLIGHT ON ALI CHEMKHI IN CONTROLLER DIVISION

ATC Systems Accountant and author Ali Chemkhi's first English book titled "Assmaa A. Andulsi: "The Girl Who is Like No Other" is a story based on a real girl. The story follows the life of a modern-day Muslim American girl who dreams of being famous. She has two identities that make her special and a girl who is like no other. This best-selling book is about a girl's love of her heritage and faith while learning to understand how other people live and believe. This book is also about tolerance, love, service, and teamwork.

Since its release in July 2020, the book has been on the Amazon best seller list in the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom under the "Teen & Young Adult Religious Fiction" category. This book will be part of a series, and Ali is currently working on the second book titled "Assmaa A. Andulsi: "The Half-a-Date Girl." Ali loves to read and write and has written many award-winning short stories and articles in Arabic, his native language. He also has a novel written in Arabic that should be published soon.

Ali attended college at California State University San Bernardino where he earned dual master's degrees in Accounting and Information Technology in 2004. Ali has worked for the County of San Bernardino for 17 years and all those years have been in ATC's Controller Division. Ali started as an Accountant I and through hard work and dedication, promoted to his current position as a Systems Accountant II. Ali's main responsibilities include running the Master Data Hotline for the entire County and putting together the Financial Transactions Report (FTR), for which he receives an award from the State Controller's Office yearly.

In addition to his career with the County, Ali has taught several subjects at Southern California universities and is a frequent speaker at mosques and other community events. Ali is a licensed CPA and an active member of the Association of Government Accountants. Ali was born in Republic of Tunisia, the most northern part of Africa. Born to parents Hasan and Mariam Chemkhi, Ali is a first generation Muslim American. Ali is married to Zina Chemkhi and they make their home in Highland, California. Ali and his wife have four beautiful children Asma, Shaima, Ahmad, and Yomna.



What's Your Story Featuring Mike Alexander



Michael Alexander
Chief Deputy, Disbursements

The Department Diversity Committee (DDC) is comprised of employees representing the nine divisions of ATC. The DDC's mission is to embrace and promote an inclusive work environment through awareness and education. Open communication, mutual respect, and thoughtful collaboration will enhance our mission to serve a diverse community, while supporting ATC's mission to conduct business in a fair, courteous, and professional manner.

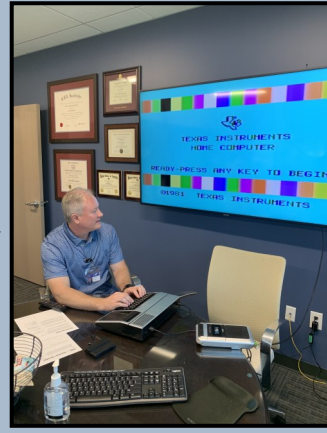
The DDC began hosting **What's Your Story** seminars featuring our employees telling their stories of life and career. Presenters are encouraged to speak from the heart – share their moments of struggle, joy and enrichment and tell us how they reached their career heights. Most recently, Mike Alexander, Chief Deputy, Disbursements, shared his upbringing in Grenada, an island in the Caribbean. Mike talked about the geography, history and culture of his home island, and the joys of being raised by his grandmother and how that influenced the person he is today. He spent a good deal of his childhood on the beach and in the water since he was living on an island. Mike has served as ATC Chief Deputy, Disbursements since January 2016. He previously served as an Auditor in the United States Marine Corps, and as Chief of Audits and Deputy Auditor-Controller for Riverside County. He holds an MBA degree from Webster University, and professional designations as a Certified Payroll Professional (CPP) and Certified Internal Auditor (CIA).



Fun Fact From ATC Mason

My Dad used to have a birthday policy - I could have anything I wanted as long as I paid for half. It was 1982 and the thing I wanted most in the world was an Apple IIe. They started at \$1200. I worked like a madman to raise money and it looked like I was going to make it, which concerned my dad because \$600 was a lot of money in 1982. And computers were seen as toys for rich people.

So he brought home a Texas Instruments 99/4a to let me play on and hopefully become hooked, as it was only about \$400. He said he would honor our deal and still match me, but because it was so much less expensive, I could buy some accessories and software with it. Apparently, it worked. I would spend up to 20 hours a day, 7 days a week one summer writing software and typing in software that others had developed. I even bribed my brothers to do some code entry by trading computer time for their labor. It led to one of my first jobs as a computer programmer at the age of 18. I worked at Software Shop Systems in Farmington, NJ writing code for construction software in BASIC.



ATC Employees of the Month (EOM) For June, July, August

All of these outstanding employees were gifted with an ATC Mason departmental polo shirt, parking in the special EOM parking spot next to the building, their photo placed on the wall located on the first floor near the employees' entrance, a \$50 gift card from ATC Mason's personal funds or lunch with him at a local restaurant, and of course, bragging rights as ATC Employee of the Month.

Guy Martinez, June 2021, Employee of the Month

Guy began his journey with the County as an Accountant I in the Controller Division in October 2015. He quickly progressed through the ranks of the Accountant series and eventually promoted to his current position, Systems Accountant II, in June 2020. Guy's primary responsibilities in his tenure with ATC have included ISF financial statements and disaster accounting.

Guy has been an integral contributor to the County's COVID-19 pandemic response. He has served as the Financial Section Chief of the County's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) since the onset of the pandemic. He has done an excellent job of pioneering and contributing to many of the new purchasing, payment, and budgeting processes needed to adequately respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Congratulations Guy!



Rhawnie Berg, July 2021, Employee of the Month

Rhawnie has been a member of the ATC team since October 2005. She joined the department as an Accountant I in the Internal Audits Section where she quickly progressed through the ranks and gained valuable knowledge and experience in positions with various ATC sections before she was promoted to her current position of Accounts Payable Manager in 2015.

Since assuming her role of AP Manager, Rhawnie has been the face of Accounts Payable. She is the resource that employees throughout the County turn to for all matters related to AP, including those from CAO, Purchasing, Risk Management, and other departments that rely on her expertise. She provides daily direction over the many aspects and functions of AP to ensure continued accuracy and timeliness of payments for County purchases. She also continues to closely monitor departments' interfaces that require her involvement to ensure the proper tax reporting of certain sensitive payments that could otherwise negatively affect the County.

Congratulations Rhawnie!



Jenny Yang, August 2021, Employee of the Month

Jenny joined the Tax Collector family in January 2019 as an Accountant II. Though Jenny was new to government, she came to ATC with extensive accounting and analysis experience from the private sector. Through her interpersonal skills and understanding of collaboration, she quickly became a key member of the Tax Collector Division and exceeded expectations in budget development and system reconciliations.

In June, 2020 Jenny promoted to a Systems Accountant II to assist with Property Tax Legacy Systems Replacement Project. She displayed initiative as she took ownership of the role and helped shape the expectations and responsibilities of the new position within the Tax Collector Division.

Congratulations Jenny!



THANK YOU ATC DIVERSITY COMMITTEE!!

The ATC Diversity Committee collected **740 books** that were donated to Children's Fund recently in a ceremony held in front of the ATC building. Dr. Cid Pinedo, Children's Fund President & CEO and Shari Hunke, Director of Marketing were elated to receive such a large donation from the Committee. Dr. Pinedo shared that the books would be distributed to kids in the surrounding communities during August.



ATC Mason and the ATC Diversity Committee present Children's Fund with 740 books in a ceremony at ATC.

Children that lack access to books, will start kindergarten 1,000,000 words behind their peers. Studies show that 74% of 3rd graders who read poorly still struggle in ninth grade, and third grade reading scores can predict a student's likelihood to graduate high school. Having access to books that family members or other caretakers can use to read to children not only increases their level of preparedness, but also provides them with an example that reading can be fun and engaging.

"Because of you, the ATC Department Diversity Committee, over 700 books will be provided to children in our county that otherwise would not have access to new quality and age appropriate books," said Dr. Pinedo. "Their minds will be fed and their imagination released to dream about their futures! Thank you for helping Children's Fund live out our vision of a bright future for every child!"

ATC Mason commented, "This generous donation demonstrates a big heart and commitment to the children who are our future. Thank you ATC employees for your generosity!"

Click here to watch the video of the ATC Book Drive: https://fb.watch/79x2Eu0_V/

CLASS OF 2021—Congratulations to all the ATC kids who are embarking on their next journey! We are proud of you!



Joelle Villeda, graduated from Aquinas High School—daughter of Laura Villeda, Automated Systems Analyst II.



Marissa Seguin, graduated Elsinore High School—granddaughter of Gale Bowen, Office assistant III in Tax Collector Division.



Congratulations Addison!

Addison Newland, promoted from Sixth Grade, Terrace View Elementary School, daughter of Anita Newland, Supervising ATC Payroll Technician.



Karleigh Boyd, Eighth Grade Promotion, Goddard Middle School in Glendora. Karleigh is the daughter of Douglas R. Boyd, Assistant ATC.



Kevin Aguilar, promoted from Eighth Grade at Jehue Middle School—grandson of Delfina Hernandez, Accounting Technician in Internal Audits Division.

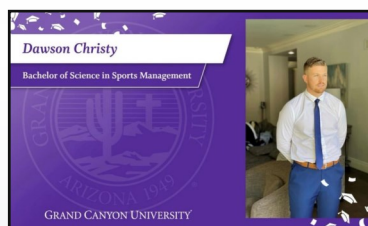


Edgar Sanchez, Intern with Internal Audits Division—Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a concentration in Accounting and Auditing, University of California, Riverside.



We proudly announce the graduation of **Shayna Christy** from Hillsboro, IL. Master of Science in Management and Leadership- Human Resources. March 16th, 2021

Shayna Christy— Master of Science in Management and Leadership in Human Resources —the niece of Tina Christy, Fiscal Specialist in the Disbursement's Division.



Dawson Christy — Bachelor of Science in Sports Management—the son of Tina Christy, Fiscal Specialist in the Disbursement's Division.

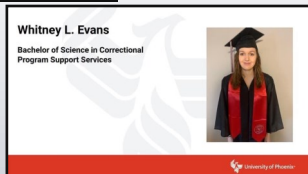


Shirley Domacio - Intern with Property Tax Division will graduate in December with her Bachelors in Accounting from California State University , San Bernardino.



Congratulations Felix!

Felix Newland, promoted from Eighth Grade, Terrace Hills Middle School, son of Anita Newland, Supervising ATC Payroll Technician.



Whitney L. Evans — Bachelor of Science in Correctional Program Support Services — the niece of Tina Christy, Fiscal Specialist in the Disbursement's Division.



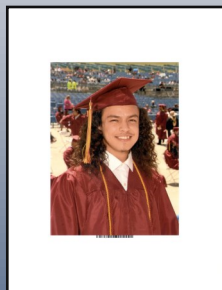
Celine Pettine, promoted from Kindergarten, NorthPark Elementary — daughter of Colleen Pettine, Supervising Fiscal Specialist.



Amina Sanders, promoted from Kindergarten, Bruce Elementary in Memphis, Tennessee — granddaughter of Buffy Moorefield, Office Assistant III in Disbursements



Daniel Hernandez, promoted to Kindergarten from San Salvador Preschool —grandson of Delfina Hernandez, Accounting Technician in Internal Audits Division.



Martin Diego Velazquez graduated from Indian Springs High School—son of Nancy Sanchez, Collections Officer I.



Benjamin Noble promoted from Transitional Kindergarten at St. Adelaide's—grandson of Wendy Ridge, Office Assistant III in the Payroll Section.



Fabian Elizais, promoted from Eighth Grade, Auburndale Intermediate School—son of Fabiola Avilez, Supervising ATC Payroll Technician.