



Client Newsletter

2015 TAX HIGHLIGHTS
WITH COMPLIMENTS FROM:
RODENZ ACCOUNTING & TAX SERVICE LLC

**Accounting • Business Consulting
Tax Preparation • Payroll Services**

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The Minnesota Association of Public Accountants has prepared this newsletter. It is not intended to be inclusive.

Any questions concerning the contents or other tax questions should be directed to your MAPA Accountant.

INDIVIDUAL HIGHLIGHTS

WHEN DOES A DEPENDENT HAVE TO FILE A RETURN

A dependent has to file a return if the dependent has:

1. Earned income only and the total is more than \$6,300.
2. Unearned income only (i.e. income which is not compensation for services) and the total is more than \$1,050.
3. Both earned and unearned income and the unearned income is more than \$350 or the total income is more than \$6,300.

KIDDIE TAX

Children who have investment income greater than \$2,100 may be subject to tax based on their parent's income. This tax has been expanded in a very complex manner to potentially apply to children under age 24 as of year end. This extended version of the kiddie tax targets two groups who have attained age 18: 1) those who reach their 18th birthday during the year, and 2) those in full-time student status for at least five months of the year who attain their 19th through 23rd birthday during the tax year. There is a further test for those in the age 18-23 groups. The kiddie tax only applies if the earned income of the child (wages and self-employment income) does not exceed one-half of the child's support for the tax year. In calculating support, amounts covered by scholarships are not taken into account. The tax does not apply to a child who is married and files a joint return for the tax year.

INDIVIDUAL MANDATE – HEALTH INSURANCE

Beginning January 1, 2014, all individuals who do not meet certain exemption criteria must have minimum essential health insurance coverage. Nonexempt individuals who do not maintain the required health insurance coverage for themselves and any nonexempt dependents are subject to a shared responsibility penalty for each month that the required insurance is not maintained.

For 2015, if you don't have coverage you'll pay the greater of (i) \$325 per person for the year (\$162.50 per child under 18) up to a maximum penalty per family of \$975, or (ii) 2% of your household income over the applicable filing threshold. The penalty is capped at the national average premium for a bronze plan. You must make the

shared responsibility payment when you file your federal income tax return. Married individuals who file a joint tax return for a tax year are jointly liable for any shared responsibility payment.

NET INVESTMENT INCOME TAX

For 2015, an additional 3.8% Net Investment Income Tax (NIIT) will be assessed on taxpayers with a modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) exceeding \$250,000 for those filing jointly, or surviving spouse, \$200,000 for head of household and single, \$125,000 for those filing married filing separately. The tax is 3.8% of the lesser of net investment income or the excess of MAGI over the threshold amount.

ADDITIONAL .9% MEDICARE TAX

An individual is liable for additional Medicare tax if the individual's wages, compensation, or self-employment income (together with that of his or her spouse if filing a joint return) exceed the threshold amount for the individual's filing status. The threshold amounts are: \$250,000 for married filing jointly, \$125,000 for married filing separately, and \$200,000 for all others.

PERSONAL EXEMPTION

The exemption for 2015 is \$4,000. For a parent to claim an exemption for a full-time student, who earns more than \$4,000, the student must be under 24 years of age as of the close of the year. A full time student must attend school for at least 5 calendar months.

Exemption phase out: the adjusted gross income thresholds where the personal exemption starts to be reduced are \$258,250 for single, \$309,900 for married filing joint and surviving spouse, \$284,050 for head of household and \$154,950 for married filing separately

STANDARD DEDUCTIONS

		Additional for elderly and/or blind
Single.....	\$6,300.....	\$1,550
Head of Household.....	\$9,250.....	\$1,550
Married Filing Joint.....	\$12,60.....	\$1,250
Married Filing Separately.....	\$6,300.....	\$1,250

If an individual can be claimed as a dependent on another taxpayer's return, the regular standard deduction is limited to the greater of \$1,050 or the dependent's earned income plus \$350 up to the regular standard deduction. If the individual is over 65 years of age and/or blind, the additional deduction will be added to the above.

ITEMIZED DEDUCTIONS

For 2015 and future years higher income taxpayers are required to phase out up to 80% of certain itemized deductions. The phase out applies to taxpayers with AGI over a threshold amount: \$258,250 (single), \$309,900 (married filing jointly), \$284,050 (head of household), or \$154,950 (married filing separately). These threshold numbers are adjusted for inflation after 2015. Basically, deductions are reduced by 3% of the amount by which AGI exceeds the threshold. However, deductions for medical expenses, investment interest, casualty and theft losses, and gambling losses are not subject to the limitation.

STANDARD MILEAGE ITEMIZED DEDUCTION RATES

The standard mileage rate allowances for 2015 are 14 cents for charitable miles and 23 cents for moving and medical.

STUDENT LOAN INTEREST

Taxpayers paying qualified education loans may be able to deduct up to \$2,500 of interest on the loans in 2015. There is a phase out that begins for taxpayers with modified adjusted gross income above \$65,000 for single taxpayers and \$130,000 for married filing joint taxpayers.

PREMIUM ASSISTANCE CREDIT

Beginning in 2014, certain low-income and moderate-income individuals are eligible for a refundable income tax credit to help pay for the health insurance coverage in a qualified health plan purchased through a Health Insurance Marketplace also known as the Exchange. Individuals can elect to have the estimated credit amount paid directly to the insurer to help pay monthly health insurance premiums during the calendar year. These are called advance payments. Generally, taxpayers eligible for the credit have household income for the tax year of at least 100%, but not more than 400% of the federal poverty line, and do not have access to employer-sponsored affordable coverage that provides a minimum value. A taxpayer whose advance credit payments exceed the final premium tax credit owes the excess as an additional income tax liability. The IRS has placed limits on the amount of the credit the taxpayer has to pay back based on household income.

CHILD TAX CREDIT

In 2015, the nonrefundable credit for each child under the age of 17 at the end of the tax year is \$1,000. For taxpayers with incomes above \$75,000 (\$110,000 married filing joint), the credit is phased out by \$50 for each \$1,000 of adjusted gross income above the threshold amount. For taxpayers whose tax liability is not large enough to fully utilize the allowable credit, the unused credit is refundable to the extent of 15% of the taxpayers earned income in excess of \$3,000.

ADOPTION CREDIT

The adoption credit can now be taken on expenses up to \$13,400. The phase out applies for filers with AGIs between \$201,010 and \$241,010. For 2015, the adoption credit isn't refundable. That means that the credit can be claimed only up to the amount of your tax liability.

AMERICAN OPPORTUNITY TAX CREDIT

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 created a \$2,500 higher education tax credit that is available for the first four years of college. The credit is based on 100% of the first \$2,000 of tuition and related expenses (including books) paid during the tax year and 25% of the next \$2,000 of tuition and related expenses paid during the tax year, subject to a phase-out for AGI in excess of \$80,000 (\$160,000 for married couples filing jointly). 40% of the credit is refundable. The credit is available through December 31, 2017.

LIFETIME LEARNING CREDIT

If a taxpayer, spouse, or dependent is a student, the taxpayer may be eligible for a nonrefundable credit of up to \$2,000 (20% of the first \$10,000 of qualified tuition and expenses). The credit is allowed for an unlimited number of years on a per taxpayer basis. It covers all 4 years of post-secondary education as well as graduate school and courses to improve job skills. There is a phase out for taxpayers with modified adjusted gross income above \$55,000 (\$110,000 married filing joint).

RESIDENTIAL ENERGY EFFICIENT PROPERTY CREDIT

Tax payers are allowed a 30% credit for the purchase of qualified property placed in service before 2017 including:

- Qualified solar energy property used to generate electricity.
- Qualified solar water heating property.
- Fuel cell property producing electricity. This credit is capped at \$500 for each .5 kilowatt of capacity.
- Qualified small wind energy property that uses wind turbines to generate electricity.
- Qualified geothermal heat pump property.

PENALTY FREE IRA WITHDRAWALS

Penalty free withdrawals (prior to age 59 ½) from all IRAs are permitted for 1) undergraduate and graduate expenses (tuition, books, and room and board) for taxpayer, spouse, children or grandchildren; 2) up to \$10,000 for first-time homebuyers, defined as taxpayer(s) who has not owned a home for two years; 3) payment of medical expenses greater than 7.5% of AGI; and 4) certain hardship exceptions. An IRA withdrawal is still subject to income tax. Be aware that if you opened your ROTH IRA less than five years prior to a distribution, the 10 percent penalty can be avoided but there may be tax on the earnings that are withdrawn.

COVERDELL EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS (FORMERLY EDUCATION IRA)

Up to \$2,000 per beneficiary per year can be contributed to an education savings account for a beneficiary under age 18, regardless of whether the contributor or the beneficiary has any earned income. It is nondeductible and is phased out pro rata as modified adjusted gross income increases from \$95,000 to \$110,000 single (\$190,000 to \$220,000 married filing joint). A Coverdell ESA can be used to pay elementary and secondary, as well as higher education expenses.

HOME OFFICE EXPENSES

Expenses related to a home office are generally deductible if, 1) you use the office exclusively on a regular basis as your principal place of business or a place patients, clients, or customers use in meeting or dealing with you; 2) you are an employee and the business use is for the convenience of your employer; or 3) you use it exclusively and regularly for administrative and management activities of your business if there is no other fixed location to perform such activities.

Effective for tax years beginning on or after January 1, 2013, the IRS allows a safe harbor business use of home deduction at a rate of \$5 per square foot for the portion of the home used in the qualified business, but not to exceed 300 square feet.

ESTIMATED TAX PAYMENTS

No penalty for failure to pay estimated tax applies for taxes payable of less than \$1,000. Household taxes must be included in estimates. If you don't meet this exception, you are required to pay the lower of: 1) pay at least 90% of the tax shown on the current year return, or 2) pay 100% of the tax shown on the prior year's return. For individuals with adjusted gross income for 2014 in excess of \$150,000 (\$75,000 if married filing separately), the estimated payments should be 110% of the prior year tax liability.

SOCIAL SECURITY EARNINGS LIMITS

The earnings limit for 2015 is \$15,720 for retirees ages 62 up to full retirement age (FRA). One dollar must be repaid for every two dollars earned over this figure. For those reaching FRA in 2015, the earnings limit for the months prior to reaching FRA is \$41,880. Starting in the month that you reach your FRA, there are no limits on your earnings.

TAXABLE SOCIAL SECURITY INCOME

Social Security income may be taxable depending on other income received. The maximum amount of Social Security income that can be included in taxable income is 85%.

SOCIAL SECURITY PAID BY WAGE EARNERS AND SELF-EMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS

Social security withheld from employee wages and calculated on self-employment income is composed of two parts: FICA (Federal Insurance Compensation Act) of 12.4% and Medicare of 2.9% which has basically remained unchanged since 1990. Half of this is paid by the employee and the other half by the employer. Self-employed individuals pay the entire amount. For tax year 2015, the FICA limit is \$118,500. Wages and self-employment income over \$118,500 is subject only to the Medicare tax.

GAIN FROM SALE OF PRINCIPAL RESIDENCE

A taxpayer generally may exclude up to \$250,000 (\$500,000 on a joint return) of gain realized on the sale or exchange of a principal residence. The taxpayer must have owned and occupied the residence as a principal residence for at least two of the five years before the sale or exchange.

The IRS Reform Act says homeowners can receive a portion of the exclusion based on how long they live in the home as long as the move is due to a change in place of employment, health, or unforeseen circumstances.

If a second home or rental property is converted to a principal residence after January 1, 2009, be aware that prior depreciation and/or some of the gain may be taxable.

CAPITAL GAINS FOR INDIVIDUALS

In 2015 the maximum capital gains rate for sales of long-term capital assets (held more than 12 months) is 20% for taxpayers in the 39.6% tax bracket and 15% for taxpayers in the 25%-35% brackets. (0% for taxpayers in the 10% and 15% brackets). For 2015, qualified dividends will continue to be taxed at the same rates as long-term capital assets.

INDIVIDUAL IRA CONTRIBUTIONS (TRADITIONAL OR ROTH)

If you and/or your spouse have taxable compensation (earnings subject to FICA and Medicare tax), you may be able to contribute to an Individual Retirement Account. The maximum Traditional IRA or ROTH IRA contribution for 2015 is \$5,500 if under the age of 50 and \$6,500 if age 50 or older as of the end of the year. Taxable deductions for contributions to a Traditional IRA may be limited if you or your spouse are covered by an employer provided retirement plan or if your income exceeds certain levels. Contributions to a Traditional IRA are not allowed in the year you reach 70 ½ and older. ROTH IRA contributions may be limited by your filing status and income. Contributions to any IRA account can be made up to the filing deadline of your tax return without extension. Excess contributions and income earned on the excess amount are subject to penalty if not withdrawn prior to the due date of your individual income tax return (including extension).

HEALTH SAVINGS ACCOUNT CONTRIBUTIONS (HSA)

If your health insurance meets the guidelines, you may be able to contribute to a Health Savings Account. For 2015, the maximum HSA contribution for a single taxpayer plan is \$3,350 with a minimum deductible of \$1,300. The maximum HSA contribution for a family plan is \$6,650 with a minimum deductible of \$2,600. There is an additional allowed contribution of \$1,000 if you are age 55 or older as of the end of the year. Contributions to an HSA account can be made up to the filing deadline of your tax return without extension. Excess contributions are not deductible and are subject to penalty unless the excess contributions are paid out to the account holder before the tax return deadline including extensions.

BUSINESS HIGHLIGHTS

STANDARD MILEAGE AND PER DIEM RATES

The standard mileage rate allowance under the optional method for vehicle expense for 2015 is 57.5 cents per business mile.

The IRS has provided optional per diem allowances for lodging and meals and incidental expenses (M&IE) while traveling for business and away from home. These are calculated using a high-low method based on the locality visited. The 2015 and 2016 daily rate is \$259 and \$275, respectively, for travel to any “high-cost locality”, which includes a \$65 and \$68 M&IE component and \$194 and \$207 for lodging.

The 2015 and 2016 daily rate is \$172 and \$185, respectively, for travel to any “low-cost locality”, which includes a \$52 and \$57 M&IE component and \$120 and \$128 for lodging. The 2015 and 2016 rates are effective for per diem allowances that are paid to an employee on or after October 1, 2014 or October 1, 2015, respectively, for travel away from home on or after October 1, 2014 or October 1, 2015 respectively.

The special M&IE rate for the transportation industry is \$63 per day in the continental US and \$68 per day outside the continental US.

HEALTH DEDUCTION FOR SELF-EMPLOYED

The self-employed health insurance deduction for 2015 is 100%. Effective March 30, 2010, the self-employed health insurance deduction may also be claimed by a taxpayer with respect to a child who has not attained age 27 by the end of the tax year.

In early 2011, the IRS has revised its guidance and reversed its position by stating in the 2010 Form 1040 instructions that “Medicare Part B premiums can be used to figure the deduction.” IRS guidance would suggest that Medicare Part D premiums would also qualify.

SECTION 179 (DEPRECIATION)

Subject to a dollar limit, the election allows you to deduct, in the tax year for which the election is made, the cost of qualifying property placed in service during the tax year. The immediate deductions allowed are in lieu of capitalization and later depreciation deductions. The annual deduction limit is \$500,000 (but, in the absence of extending legislation, scheduled to decrease to \$25,000 for tax years beginning after calendar year 2014). The deduction is phased out (i.e., gradually reduced) if more than a specified amount of qualifying property is placed in service during the tax year. The amount is \$2,000,000 (but, in the absence of extending legislation, scheduled to decrease to \$200,000 for tax years beginning after calendar year 2014).

SMALL BUSINESS HEALTH CARE TAX CREDIT

This credit is for small employers, less than 25 full-time workers who cover at least 50% of the cost of health care coverage for some of its workers based on the single rate. The employer must pay average annual wages below \$52,000. This credit is worth up to 50% of a small business’ premium costs in 2015. However, for tax years beginning after 2013, the credit is only available if the employer purchases health insurance coverage for its employees through the SHOP Marketplace. This credit is available to eligible employers for two consecutive years.

MONTHLY PAYROLL DEPOSIT THRESHOLD

If your Form 941 payroll tax liability is under the \$2,500 threshold, employers in a return period are not required to make monthly deposits or make the payment online through EFTPS. The amount can be remitted with the Form 941 and the 941-V payment voucher. Also, if your Form 940 tax liability is less than \$500, you can make the tax payment with Form 940 and the 940-V payment voucher.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR LARGE EMPLOYERS

Under the health care law, Applicable Large Employers (ALE) – those with 50 or more full-time employees, including full-time equivalent employees, in the preceding year – are required to report some information regarding health coverage by filing information returns with the IRS and furnishing statements to full-time employees. If you’re an ALE, you report information about health coverage you offered to each full-time employee, or to show that you didn’t offer coverage to the full-time employee. This information will help the IRS determine whether an employer shared responsibility payment applies to your organization and is also used in determining the eligibility of employees for the premium tax credit. The information returns will be due in 2016 for 2015. More information can be found at <https://www.irs.gov/Affordable-Care-Act/Employers/ACA-Information-Center-for-Applicable-Large-Employers-ALEs> or Healthcare.gov.

EXPIRED TAX PROVISIONS (PARTIAL LIST) FOR TAX YEAR 2015 UNLESS CONGRESS VOTES TO EXTEND:

INDIVIDUAL:

- Credit for certain nonbusiness energy property (such as energy efficient windows, etc.)
- Deduction for certain expenses of elementary and secondary school teachers
- Discharge of indebtedness on principal residence excluded from gross income of individuals
- Premiums for mortgage insurance deductible as interest
- Deduction for state and local general sales taxes
- Deduction for qualified tuition and related expenses

Tax-free distributions from individual retirement plans for charitable purposes

100-percent exclusion for sale of qualified small business stock

BUSINESS:

- Additional first-year depreciation (bonus depreciation)
- Section 179 (depreciation) expense up to \$500,000 (see paragraph above)
- Tax credit for research and experimentation expenses

MINNESOTA HIGHLIGHTS

TAX RATES

Individual income tax rates are 5.35%, 7.05%, 7.85% and 9.85%. Minnesota added the 9.85% bracket in 2013. The AMT rate is 6.75%.

EDUCATION TAX CREDIT

Families with children in grades K-12 may qualify for a refundable tax credit of up to \$1,000 per child for educational expenses paid during the year. The income and credit limits are based on the number of qualifying children. For families with 1 or 2 children, household income must be below \$37,500. For families with more than 2 children, the income limit increases by \$2,000 per child.

SUBTRACTION FOR SCHOOL EXPENSES

You may subtract a maximum of \$1,625 per qualifying child (K-6) and \$2,500 (grades 7-12) for qualifying expenses. There is no family maximum deduction. The term “qualifying child” is the same as the federal definition of a qualifying child for Earned Income Credit purposes. This will allow a custodial parent who makes educational expenditures for his or her child to claim the subtraction even if the non-custodial parent claims the child as a dependent.

MINNESOTA WORKING FAMILY CREDIT

Families that qualify for the federal earned income credit also qualify for the Minnesota Working Family Credit. Schedule M1WFC must be completed to determine the amount of the credit.

MARRIAGE CREDIT

The marriage credit for 2015 provides married taxpayers who each have at least \$22,000 of earned income, a credit against the Minnesota regular tax. The credit ranges from \$1 to a maximum of \$382.

CHARITABLE DEDUCTIONS

Individuals who do not itemize on their federal income tax return are allowed to subtract contributions that would be charitable deductions under the IRS code. Up to 50% of the total contributions for the year in excess of \$500 can be subtracted.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

Minnesota residents, on active duty, stationed outside of Minnesota are no longer considered nonresidents for income tax purposes. However, you are allowed a subtraction for military compensation, if included in federal taxable income, including Active Guard Reserve (AGR) Program compensation earned under Title 32.

A Minnesota resident who served in a combat zone or qualifying hazardous duty area at any time from January 1, 2012 through December 31, 2015 may be eligible for a refundable credit. The credit for 2015 equals \$120 for each month or part month served in a combat zone for taxpayers whose military records indicate Minnesota as their home of record.

Effective January 1, 2013 – If you (and your spouse if filing a joint return) are a veteran of the military (including the National Guard and Reserves), you may qualify for a nonrefundable credit reducing your income by as much as \$750 for past service. You can qualify for this credit if you have been separated from service and meet **one or more** of the following conditions:

- You served in the military for at least 20 years;
- You have a service-related disability rated by the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs as being 100 percent total and permanent; or
- You were honorably discharged and receive a pension or other retirement pay for service in the military.

Veterans with income of more than \$37,500 are not eligible for the credit.

MINNESOTA SECTION 179 (DEPRECIATION)

Minnesota limits Section 179 to \$25,000 (even if federal law extends the maximum to \$500,000).

