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contact Preston Trigg at 813-307-6520 or 813-918-6980**

Governor, Lt. Gov. Recognize Hillsborough Tax Collector with Award

TAMPA, Fla. - (June 11, 2007) - Gov. Charlie Crist, Lt. Gov. Jeff Kottkamp, and the Florida Sterling Council honored Hillsborough County Tax Collector Doug Belden with a 2007 Sterling Quality Achievement Award for performance excellence. Belden and the Tax Collector's Office were one of seven honorees to receive the award at Sterling's recent annual conference and banquet in Orlando with nearly 1,500 in attendance.

Belden's office was recognized for its Disaster Mitigation Program, a two-year effort to upgrade and prepare Tax Collector facilities and infrastructure for man-made and natural disasters, such as a hurricane. The program involved the "hardening" of Tax Collector offices countywide, the installation of industrial-sized generators with multi-day fuel capacity and the development of redundant procedures to safeguard data and ensure the continuity of communications in the wake of a disaster.

Belden said many elements of the plan were the result of collaboration with the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners, which helped fund the effort. As a result, Belden's offices, located in different parts of the county, will be able to accommodate other county agencies in the wake of a disaster because of extra data and communications capabilities. Belden also credited his Information Systems and Special Projects departments, which visited the counties hit hardest by Charley to determine "lessons learned."

"One of the things we learned from Polk and Charlotte counties after (Hurricane) Charley in 2004 was that Tax Collector Offices played a critical role after the storm passed," Belden said. "People were looking to the Tax Collector for copies of automobile, boat and mobile home titles, and the offices are responsible for issuing Business Tax licenses to out-of-town contractors making repairs after the storm.

"Although people in those counties suffered tremendously, they should know it wasn't in vain," Belden added. "What we learned from those counties may save lives in the future."

The Florida Sterling Council is a public/private not-for-profit organization supported by the Executive Office of the Governor. The Sterling Quality Achievement recognition is given to organizations for approaches, methods, strategies or processes that represent role-model practices other organizations could learn from. Each winner undergoes a series of in-depth assessments and evaluations by Sterling examiners that analyze productivity and organizational performance.

The Governor's Sterling Award and the Sterling Management Model are based on the National Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. Since 1992, The Florida Sterling Council has assisted organizations in utilizing proven standards of excellence as a guide to making improvements that generate better operations, customer value, and overall results.

Other organizations receiving Sterling Achievement Awards in Orlando were Coral Springs Charter School, the Marion County Sheriff's Office, the Miami-Dade Transit Department, the Orange County Clerk of Courts, the U.S. Coast Guard's Clearwater Healthcare System and Studer Group of Gulf Breeze.