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# ARIZONA TAX RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **ATRA Announces Good Government Award Winner**

The Arizona Tax Research Association (ATRA) selected Fritz Behring as the recipient of the *J. Elliott Hibbs ATRA Good Government Award* for 2011. The award was presented during ATRA's Annual Meeting Luncheon on Friday, November 18 at the Pointe Hilton Tapatio Cliffs Resort.

For the last 18 years, ATRA has recognized outstanding individuals whose work in the public sector is characterized by strong, continuing, and consistent efforts to spend taxpayer dollars wisely and to promote government that is efficient, open, and accountable. ATRA solicits nominations from local governments and state agencies, which are then reviewed by ATRA members and staff.

Fritz Behring was hired as the Manager of Pinal County in November 2010. Immediately after arriving in Pinal County, Fritz set his sights on a crucial examination of the county's budget. In his explanation to the Board of Supervisors and other county elected officials in formulating the fiscal year (FY) 2011-12 budget, Fritz provided a clear and direct message: "The business model for local government in Arizona has to change. The old model no longer works given the financial situation we find ourselves in." The outcome was that Pinal County ended up cutting its total budget nearly 17% in FY 2011-12 – by far, the largest decrease of all of Arizona's counties. The dramatic decrease in Pinal County's budget was largely the result of the county keeping its primary tax rate the same although the county lost over 15% in taxable property values. By keeping the tax rate the same, the county's primary levy plummeted over \$16 million.

One of the key criteria for the ATRA Good Government Award is openness and transparency in government. Openness and transparency provides taxpayers and citizens the opportunity to work cooperatively with public employees, which ultimately leads to more effective and efficient government. In the short amount of time that Fritz Behring has been the Pinal County Manager, he has created a culture of conservative financial management, as well as government transparency and accountability. During the FY 2011-12 budget process, Fritz regularly met with local taxpayers to discuss their major concerns and to educate those taxpayers on the fiscal issues facing the county.

Mr. Behring met the challenges of Pinal County's budget through strategic personnel cuts, salary freezes and a thorough review of policies and procurement, coupled with better, more accurate forecasting. In presenting the award to Fritz, ATRA President Kevin McCarthy noted that, "In just one year as the Pinal County Manager, Fritz has displayed the attributes of a true public finance professional: accountability, transparency, expertise, and customer service. It is ATRA's hope that this award will not only serve as a much deserved pat on the back to Fritz and Pinal County but also encouragement to Pinal County to continue this path of fiscal responsibility."