

Beating the sales tax game — or not

My wife does a lot of shopping at the malls.

As a rational consumer, I often wonder if we are getting the biggest bang for our buck

when we spend those precious consumer dollars. So I decided to research the differing sales tax rates in Chicago and some of its suburbs.

What I found was quite a difference among sales tax rates for general merchandise.

Sales tax rates on clothing, furniture, appliances, and gardening products, for example, range from a low of 7 percent to a high of 9.25 percent. Stores located in Chicago charge the most, at 9.25 percent. Here's a detailed breakdown:

- Deerfield (Cook County side), Evanston, Schaumburg (Cook County side), Skokie, and Wheeling (Cook County side) stores charge 9 percent.

- Stores in Glenview (excluding the Chestnut-Waukegan Business District where 9.75 percent applies), and Northbrook (Cook County side) charge 8.75 percent.

- Winnetka, Wheeling (Lake county side), Deerfield (Lake County side), Highland Park, Lake Bluff, and Mundelein stores charge 8 percent.

- Bannockburn, Lake Forest, and Riverwoods stores charge 7.5 percent, while Libertyville and Vernon Hills stores charge 7 percent.

So for a family making a large merchandise purchase, say \$25,000, the difference between making that purchase in Chicago and making it in Vernon Hills is \$562.50.

SPOONFUL OF SUGAR

BY RICHARD A.

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The differences are less dramatic if you are buying groceries. You are better off shopping in Lake County cities like Bannockburn, Deerfield and Wheel-

ing on their Lake County sides, Highland Park, Lake Bluff, Lake Forest, Libertyville, Mundelein, Riverwoods and Vernon Hills, where the sales tax rate on groceries is 1.75 percent.

In contrast, buying groceries in the Cook County cities of Chicago, Deerfield, Northbrook and Wheeling's Cook portion, Evanston, Glenview, Skokie, and Winnetka will cost 2.25 percent. If a family spends \$200 per week on groceries, the savings add up to \$52 per year.

There is a special sales tax that applies to purchases of motor vehicles. Stores located in the Cook County cities we researched all charge 7.25 percent, while stores located in the Lake County cities we researched charge 7 percent. On a purchase, for example, of a \$40,000 Crossover/SUV, the difference is \$100.

When I asked my wife to do all our shopping at Vernon Hills from now on, she frowned and said she had her favorite stores elsewhere. So I guess I learned a lesson about the rational consumer that isn't found in the textbooks.

In my next column, I will talk about the impact that Internet shopping has on bricks and mortar stores, and the collision course we are headed toward, come this fall ...

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