

TABLE TALK WITH
IRS COMMISSIONER MARK EVERSON '71 | by Bill Ewing

As Exonians filed their tax returns this spring—with some reluctance, no doubt, like everyone else—they could take some small consolation knowing that a fellow Exonian was on the receiving end.

“No one really enjoys giving over money to the government, but it’s understood that it needs to happen,” acknowledges Mark Everson ’71. As the new commissioner of the Internal Revenue Service, Everson oversees the operation of the nation’s entire tax collection process. “The average American pays his or her taxes and does his or her best to comply with the system. They respect the role taxes play in our society. But do they want the IRS to provide better service and do a better job of enforcing the law against those who don’t comply? Absolutely.”

Appointed by President Bush to the five-year post of IRS commissioner in May 2003, Everson says his top priorities are improving the service provided to taxpayers (focusing on expanded use of technology) and strengthening the enforcement of tax laws. “Prior to my arrival, the agency was emphasizing the service side and the enforcement side was allowed to languish somewhat,” he says. “We’re now recentering the agency to provide both service and enforcement. Our working equation is service plus enforcement equals compliance. Not one over the other.”

The IRS is a vast and complex organization with 100,000 employees and an annual budget of \$10 billion. In 2002, they processed 226 million tax returns, collected more than \$2 trillion in revenues and issued \$283 billion in refunds. “The IRS touches more people than any other government agency,” he explains. “It’s important to our democracy that the law be fairly enforced and that we provide good service to our customers.”

Everson brings to the commissioner’s post a wealth of high-level managerial and financial experience gained in both the public and private sectors. He has held senior positions in the federal government and in large multinational corporations. From 1982 to 1988, he served in the Reagan administration, holding a variety of different positions in the U.S. Information Agency, Department of Justice, and Immigration and Natural-

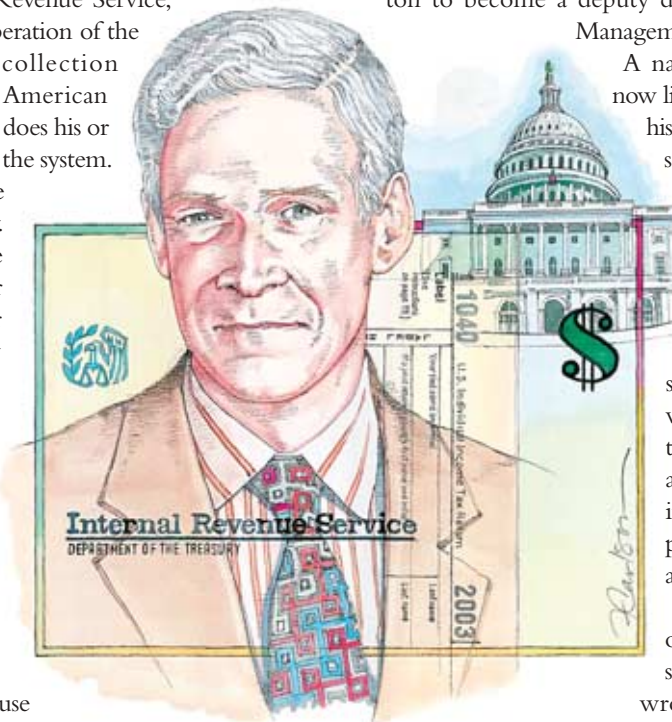
ization Service. This was followed by 10 years with Pechiney, one of France’s largest industrial companies, where he held executive financial and operations positions in Turkey, France and several locations in the United States, and then by a stint as vice president of finance for Sky Chefs International Services, Inc., a Dallas-based food service company. In 2001, he returned to Washington to become a deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget.

A native of New York who now lives in Arlington, VA, with his wife and two sons, Everson attributes some of his interest in public service to his education at Exeter. In classes like those taught by history instructor Steve Smith ’68, ’72 (Hon.), Everson says he learned “that it’s a wider world out there and that it’s important to look at the big issues.” Developing a career that included public service, he says, “was a natural decision.”

Originally a member of the class of ’72, Everson—who ran track and wrote for *The Exonian*—benefited from the Academy’s conversion to a semester system in 1968, which allowed him to graduate one year early. Putting this extra time to good use, Everson spent the ensuing year managing a poultry farm for a private company in Zambia before heading off to Yale. “That was probably the most challenging position I have ever held because I was the least ready for it,” recalls Everson. “The country had only been independent for seven years at that point and there were very few other Americans.”

After receiving a bachelor’s degree in history from Yale, and briefly considering a career in law, Everson headed to New York City, where he entered a program at the accounting firm of Arthur Anderson that allowed him to work full time during the day and earn a master’s in accounting from the New York University Business School at night. After six years as an accountant, it was off to Washington.

“If you’d asked me 35 years ago when I was a prep at Wentworth Hall what I would be doing in 2004, I wouldn’t have said running the IRS,” says Everson. “But my years in public service have been the most satisfying in my career. I’ve never been happier.”



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