

Free tax-preparation sites open

Lower-income people can apply for valuable earned-income tax credit

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Ginny Britt, an advocate for the poor, described the earned-income tax credit as "the largest anti-poverty program in America."

Free tax-preparation services are available for lower-income families and individuals for the 2008 tax season.

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and Earned Income Tax Credit, or VITA-EITC, program in Winston-Salem and Forsyth County opened free tax-preparation sites this week. The tax sites will remain open until April 15, the filing deadline.

The VITA-EITC program, known as the "Building My Future" Campaign, is sponsored by the Forsyth Working Families Partnership. The partnership is a collaborative of various agencies in the community serving low-income families and such other institutions as United Way and local businesses and universities.

Help on asset-building will also be available at the tax sites.

"When you go and apply for the EITC and find out you're going to get something back, there's a person there to talk to you about what's the best use of that money," said Ginny Britt, a co-chairwoman of the partnership and the executive director of the Advocacy for the Poor in Winston-Salem.

The IRS has declared Wednesday National EITC Day to help bring attention to the program nationwide. Locally, a new feature of the program is a Web site at www.ForsythFreeTax.org.

People can find information about free tax-preparation sites in Forsyth County and an explanation of the EITC on the Web site. Information about the tax locations and their schedules is also available by calling First Line at 703-3000.

The Web site and information line give the tax-site days, times, opening dates and locations where families with incomes of \$40,000 or less and individuals with incomes up to \$20,000 can get free income-tax preparation and electronic filing. The tax sites include the Central, Rural Hall, Southside and Jordan-Malloy libraries, along with Goodwill Industries, Truliant Federal Credit Union, the Downtown Health Plaza and the Experiment in Self Reliance.

The Web site also provides links to lists of additional locations that take taxpayers by appointment, are offered by AARP, and are in Davidson County. It also provides information and links to IRS training and certification for volunteers, and on the earned-income tax credit.

Many eligible taxpayers often do not receive the tax credit because they are not aware that they can file for it.

"I think the earned-income tax credit is the largest anti-poverty program in America," Britt said.

She said that lower-income families can qualify for up to \$4,700, but it has always been hard to get them to apply for the tax credit.

She estimates that Forsyth County taxpayers can still reclaim \$8 million in refunds from the

credit.

“That’s a lot of money if we can get people to apply,” she said, “and it’s a lot of money to put into the community.”

Last year, the VITA-EITC program served more than 4,700 families throughout the community by preparing their taxes for free through trained and certified volunteers and helping households claim the tax break for low- to moderate-income working families. Almost \$2 million was retrieved in EITC refunds for families and the local economy, and nearly \$4 million in total refunds were processed, the partnership said.

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