

Community Action Agency offering free tax-preparation assistance for certain residents

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AP

The Community Action Agency is offering free tax-preparation assistance for residents of Jackson, Lenawee and Hillsdale counties with a household income of \$50,000 or less. Volunteers certified by the Internal Revenue Service will be available to help residents receive their maximum tax refund.

"The IRS provides training to the volunteers. They have to attend classes as well as put in a lot of time on their own to prepare for tests they must take in order to become certified," said Diane Bach, Community Outreach manager from the Community Action Agency. "We have a range of people who volunteer from college students to lawyers. They are all here to help."

Get help

Appointments will begin Jan. 30 with day, evening and weekends available at many locations within the three counties. They are scheduled Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. by calling the Community Action Agency at 800-750-9300 (Hillsdale), 800-491-0004 (Jackson) or 800-438-1845 (Lenawee).

About 50 percent of residents in each county are eligible for the program, but only about 7 percent typically take advantage of the free service. Last year more than 5,800 people used the free service in Jackson, Lenawee and Hillsdale counties. "We always have many returning clients year to year, but we would love to help service new people as well," Bach said. "I do not think people know about the program or how to take advantage of it."

Individuals who receive Social Security, SSI or veteran's benefits or people needing special assistance are encouraged to use the free service. Volunteers also will assist users with tax credits, including home heating credits, earned income tax credit, child tax credit and homestead property tax credit. All of the forms for federal, state and city taxes will be prepared and e-filed at no cost. "This service is funded each year through grants and has been in Jackson County for about 10 years," Bach said. "We are here to help residents get every penny they deserve."

This year's IRS filing deadline is April 17 for federal and state taxes. The tax program is offered year-round to assist clients. "We help people all the time. If you do not owe the government, you can file at any time. Last year, we filed a return on Jan. 28," Bach said.