

CAA offers free tax assistance with VITA volunteers

By Diane Bach

Did you know that Community Action Agency provides free income tax preparation services year-round? Yes, Community Action Agency (CAA) provides free income tax preparation through the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.

Do you think you are not required to file income tax returns because you are a senior citizen or for some other reason? While that may be true, you may be missing out on money available to you through some state credits. If you own your home you may be eligible for Homestead Property Tax Credits. If you own your home or even if you rent, you may be eligible for



a Home Heating Credit.

VITA is an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) sponsored program that has been in existence since 1969. CAA provides this service for individuals who meet the one and only qualification — household income of less than \$49,000 — in Lenawee, Hillsdale and Jackson counties.

Every year, CAA recruits volunteers for the VITA program in Lenawee County. Volunteers do not need experience doing taxes. CAA trains volunteers using IRS materials. Volunteers are required to pass IRS tests

and become certified by the IRS in order to prepare taxes as a VITA volunteer. Other volunteers provide greeting, administrative and translator help which do not require certification.

Volunteers are available to help clients complete the necessary paperwork. Then clients will meet individually with a certified tax preparer volunteer to review their information so they can file the forms necessary for you to receive all of the money you are entitled to receive. Volunteers are able to complete the federal, state and city (where applicable) returns as well as any tax credits including the federal and Michigan Earned Income Tax Credits, Home Heating Credits, Child Tax Credits, Homestead Property

Tax Credits and other available credits. All at no charge.

All returns can be electronically filed (e-filed) with the refunds being direct deposited into your savings or checking account. This allows you to receive your money in about 10-14 days. For tax year 2010, 12 certified tax preparer volunteers served more than 2,600 Lenawee County residents — approximately 28 percent more than the 2009 tax year. These residents received more than \$2.4 million in credits and refunds — approximately 47 percent more than the 2009 tax year.

All returns are prepared by appointment only. To schedule an appointment, call the Lenawee County CAA office at 263-7861 or 800-438-1845 or call 211. The

appointment scheduler will be able to tell callers about all of the documents needed for their appointment.

CAA is partnering with many local agencies and organizations to provide VITA services. Our Lenawee County partners include Adrian Area Chamber of Commerce, Adrian College, Adrian Ecumenical Forum, Adrian Head Start, Catholic Charities of Jackson, Lenawee and Hillsdale, Lenawee Community Foundation, Lenawee County Department of Human Services, Lenawee County Department on Aging, Lenawee Emergency and Affordable Housing Corp. (LEAHC), Lenawee Intermediate School District, Lenawee United Way, Region 2 Area Agency

on Aging, Siena Heights University, South Central Credit Union, and many others.

All of our partners are involved in the Tri-County Financial Stability Coalition (TCFSC) which works to increase the awareness of financial education, asset building, free tax preparation services by supporting the VITA program and workshops on personal finances including improving credit scores, credit and budget counseling and Individual Development Accounts (IDA). Additional information about the TCFSC is available by phone at 517-784-4800.

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