

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Free tax help available

CAA in Adrian helps with local, state and federal taxes

By Dennis Pelham
Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN — The Community Action Agency offices on South Street in Adrian are abuzz with clients and volunteers filling out income tax forms this month. CAA provides free tax help to people with household income up to \$54,000.

There is a rush of activity each February after people receive their W2 forms and gather up other tax documents, said office director Burt Fenby.

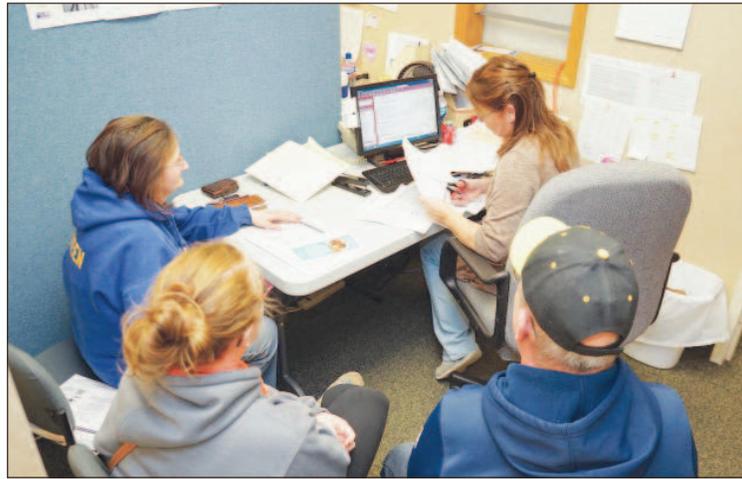
“Everybody wants their money as quickly as possible,” he said.

After a lull in March, he said, there is normally another rush in April by clients who expect they will have to send a check to the Internal Revenue Service.

The program is made possible by volunteers who agree to go through training and certification in order to work hours without pay to help others.

Diane Bach, the CAA Adrian office’s deputy director, recruits and maintains a corps of volunteers to make it happen, Fenby said.

“They come in to work at 8 o’clock in the morning, and come back after lunch,” Fenby said. “At 5 o’clock, we all leave to go home, but the volunteers come back and



The Green family, including Wanita, right, Ericka and William, have their taxes processed Friday by Christine Lighthall at the Community Action Agency in Adrian. TELEGRAM PHOTO BY LAD STRAYER

work through the evening.”

“We’re totally driven by volunteers,” Bach said.

There is a group of experienced volunteers who come back every year, Bach said.

One is a Blissfield man who drives from his job in Monroe to work evenings, filling out tax forms.

Volunteers are needed for more than just filling out taxes, she said. Volunteers also help schedule client visits and perform other chores involved in the program.

“We are always looking for volunteers,” Bach said. It is too late for training new volunteers for the current tax season, she said, but volunteers can sign up to be called for training in January next year.

“Newly retired people looking for something to do — they’re perfect for this because they can come in during the day,” she said.

It is also an opportunity for unpaid college interns to gain valuable experience, Bach said. Interns regularly come from Jackson

College, Siena Heights University, Adrian College and Baker College, she said.

Working with clients gives them more experience than simply filling out the tax forms, Bach said.

“It gives them an excellent real-life opportunity,” she said.

The program also is an economic boost to the community, Bach said.

“Last year we did over 2,500 tax returns and secured over \$3 million for these folks,” she said. Those tax refunds are spent at local businesses and to pay local property taxes, she said.

Assistance is provided with state and city income taxes, as well as federal.

The IRS provides materials to train volunteers to do much more than fill out simple federal forms.

“We can do itemizing,” Bach said.

There is also assistance with state tax credits available for heating and rental expenses, even if people are not required to file federal income tax returns, Fenby said. People who receive food stamps can lose benefits if they do not apply for heating credits, he said.

“It’s a wonderful program, and the volunteers are just wonderful,” Bach said. “They’re not in it for the glory, they’re in it because they love it.”