

HELPING HANDS

Know the resources in Centre County for income tax filing season

BY EVANGELINE WRIGHT

For many of us, January marks a time of reflection, a time when we turn our mind from the excesses of the holiday season to more sober things, including the necessity of filing a federal income tax return. That's right, income tax filing season is upon us.

Take a deep breath, roll up your sleeves and plunge right in. Happily, you don't need to do it alone. Commercial tax preparers and commercial tax preparation software can make your task easier, but there are other options as well. For taxpayers with income below \$69,000, the IRS offers free, easy to use software at <https://www.irs.gov/filing/free-file-do-your-federal-taxes-for-free>.

THE IRS PROVIDES ANSWERS TO A NUMBER OF TAX LAW QUESTIONS ON ITS WEBSITE.

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program offers free tax help to people who make \$56,000 or less, persons with disabilities and limited English speaking taxpayers who need assistance in preparing their own tax returns. The Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) program offers free tax help for all taxpayers, particularly those who are 60 years of age and older. To locate a VITA or TCE site near you, you can use the Locator Tool at <https://irs.treasury.gov/>

[freetaxprep](https://www.irs.gov/efile) or call 800-906-9887.

For the fortunate majority, our personal dealings with the IRS will be limited to filing an income tax return and either paying the remainder of our tax obligation or receiving a refund. Some of us, however, will receive notice of an IRS audit or exam. Some of us will need to enter into installment plans in order to meet our income tax obligation or discover that our income tax refund has been held by the IRS to pay tax debts from previous years. Some of us will need to file appeals to the U.S. Tax Court because we disagree with the IRS's assessment of our tax obligation. Some of us will need to negotiate collection alternatives with the IRS because our spouse

withheld financial information from us or because paying our tax obligation would leave us without the resources to meet our basic needs. Help exists for these situations, too.

The IRS provides answers to a number of tax law questions on its website through its Interactive Tax Assistant at <https://www.irs.gov/help/ita>. MidPenn Legal Services offers free representation to eligible taxpayers (at or below 250% of the federal poverty level) through its Low Income Taxpayer Clinic. The Clinic prioritizes both legal representation and education for low-income and ESL taxpayers. If you are experiencing a controversy with the IRS, you are welcome to contact MidPenn Legal Services at 1-844-MPLS-TAX (844-675-7829) to discuss your eligibility for services. For more information about MidPenn Legal Services, visit our website at www.midpenn.org.

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