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News

'United' tax support

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BRISTOL — Ben Franklin once said, "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." The good news, however, is that the United Way of West Central Connecticut is here to help with the latter.

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program saved some 65 participants a total of more than \$135,000, according to the United Way.

This past tax season, the local United Way introduced national IRS program designed to provide free tax filing assistance to needy families. The program is staffed by trained volunteers who try to find as many deductions as possible for eligible clients.

VITA, instituted in 1969, was incorporated into the local United Way as a part of its community investment initiative.

"It seemed like the perfect fit," said Colleen Bolingbroke, director of marketing and community relations at the United Way of West Central Connecticut. "We're focused on making sure people are stable and financially independent."

The United Way said 20 volunteers assisted 65 clients from Bristol, Burlington, Plainville and Plymouth whose average adjusted income was just over \$12,000. Clients received an average state refund of \$229.84, and an average federal refund of \$2,018.39.

Overall, the program spent 465 hours helping families file their income tax returns, and saved them over \$135,000 dollars — an average of \$2,084 per family.

Although smaller in comparison to some of the other VITA programs around the state, relatively speaking, the VITA program saved its clients "a lot of money," said Bolingbroke.

The program was strictly limited to people who were eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit, a federal tax credit established in 1975 for low to moderate income individuals. However, for next year, the United Way of West Central Connecticut plans to expand the eligibility, said Bolingbroke.

"We want to open up the program to as many people as possible," she said, "really just hoping to help more people than last year."

The help was greatly appreciated by one single mother who saved over \$5,000 with the program's help.

"It took the stress off of me for having to file my own taxes," she wrote in an exit survey, "I got so much more back this year than I could ever have dreamed of getting. Thank you so much!"

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