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Free Tax Prep Help at Your Library

It is timely to talk about the elephant in the room as we come into the new year: Income Taxes. The IRS and tax season are unavoidable for most of us but have no fear! You need to know about a free program that is here to help ease the burden. The program is at public libraries among other accessible sites - the unsung heroes, the quiet warriors, the “undercover” tax havens that have been quietly saving our sanity for decades.

For ages, libraries have served generally as resources for all things tax related, including official tax forms, IRS Publications and DIY 1040s. They still are for those looking to do it the old-school, paper and pencil way, but these magical buildings are also havens for a program that has been around for a long time too. This program is called the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.

For those making under \$70,000 a year, or who are over 55, are disabled, or are veterans, you qualify to have your taxes done for free via this invaluable VITA program. The VITA program isn't just some bland tax thing; it's the Avenger of the tax world, swooping in to save the day! For over 50 years, tax-savvy volunteers, community partners and the IRS have turned our local libraries into tax command centers, armed with knowledge, forms, and a dash of enthusiasm to make your tax journey a tad less daunting. All this for FREE!

In just one quarter of the calendar year, this powerhouse program injects approximately \$1.5 million into Westmoreland County community benefits; \$1.3 million of this is just in refunds, and the rest in the would-be, exorbitant tax preparation fees. That's not just loose change; it's a significant impact right in our backyard.

Sustaining this program does take dedicated volunteers willing to put in a little effort to learn a new skill and help their fellow neighbors. Think about it as a potential volunteer; you are gaining invaluable experience, making connections, and, hey, who knows, maybe discovering a calling you never knew existed! You are not a numbers person you say but still you are a faithful volunteer, assisting others through their fiscal duties. And you'll be doing this with friends -- albeit friends armed with calculators and the tax code -- to help along the way, all with the common goal to save people money filing their taxes. If you ARE a numbers person, tax professional, attorney or real estate agent, this is an amazing opportunity to obtain continuing education credits, while serving your community. We have FUN too!

One VITA location nearby is Delmont Public Library, a model library in other ways too. It stands as a beacon of modernity and community engagement. Spanning 4,150 square feet, it embraces eco-friendly “green” features such as geothermal heating, electric automobile charging stations, and solar panels adorning its roof. It is not just a place for books; it is an inviting space, offering a sanctuary for learning, discovery, and, yes, tax assistance too.

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So, come help us as a program volunteer, or for those who qualify, stop by to let us help you. If you do not have a library card (or haven't used yours in some time), this is a great time to rediscover all the wonderful services your Magic Library Card affords you.

Whether ready to be trained as a volunteer or seeking tax help to have your taxes prepared by an IRS-certified volunteer, call 211 from anywhere in southwestern PA to make an appointment (starting January 15th; programs begin at Delmont Public Library on January 22nd). Or Email mgamblin@westmorelandca.org for more information about volunteering-no experience needed.

Mallory Gamblin
Board Trustee, Delmont Public Library
Financial Counseling Supervisor, Westmoreland Community Action