

## Local agencies offer help with tax prep



The Daily Progress/Megan Lovett

Martha Trujillo (left) and Reimi Okuyama prepare for the upcoming tax season at the United Way-Thomas Jefferson Area.

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A flurry of W-2s and other tax forms will start accumulating in mailboxes in the coming weeks, signaling another tax season.

But not every Charlottesville-area resident will need to spend money or time filling out 1040s. The Thomas Jefferson Area Earned Income Tax Credit Coalition is offering free tax preparation for people who made less than \$41,646 in 2008, and is trying to find people who are eligible for the tax credit.

The Earned Income Tax Credit is a federal credit that can result in a tax refund to eligible low-income and middle-income individuals and families. In 1975, Congress passed the tax credit legislation to entice people to work and offset Social Security taxes, according to the Internal Revenue Service's Web site. If the credit is higher than the amount of taxes an eligible person owes, that person can get a tax refund up to \$4,824.

Eligibility for the credit depends on income, whether someone files taxes separately and jointly and if they have children. For more information on eligibility, contact one of the free tax preparation sites below.

Jon Nafziger, vice president for community initiatives at the United Way-Thomas Jefferson Area, said many people still are unaware of the tax credit.

"The estimates are as many as 20 percent of people who are eligible for the credit don't take advantage of it," Nafziger said. "We think there is a significant number in our community who haven't taken advantage of it."

Kim Connolly, the local United Way's marketing and communications director, said the coalition's goal in raising awareness about the credit is to help working families keep as much money as possible. Connolly said the coalition also is warning people about "instant refunds," which are short-term, high-interest loans that allow people to walk away with a portion of their tax refund in cash. Instead, the coalition is touting direct deposit so that people can get their money in seven to 10 days.

The following volunteer tax preparation sites will be open starting Feb. 1 to April 15. This list does not include AARP Tax Aide sites:

—The Monticello Area Community Action Agency is offering free tax prep from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays through Fridays and from 5 to 7 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays at 1025 Park St. Walk-ins are allowed, but the agency recommends calling 295-3171 to make an appointment.

—Urban Vision will have free tax preparation services at the Friendship Court Community Center at 418 Garrett St. Volunteers will be available from 5 to 8 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays. Walk-ins are welcome. For more information, call 882-0999 or 825-6608.

—The University of Virginia Human Resources department in the Michie North Building at 914 Emmet St. also will be offering tax prep from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays. Walk-ins are welcome. Call 972-1701 for more information.

—The United Way-Thomas Jefferson Area is offering tax prep by appointment only at its office, 806 E. High St. Call 972-1701 to schedule an appointment.

Anyone who is planning to visit one of these tax sites should bring photo ID, Social Security cards and birth dates for everyone in the family; all wage, interest and student loan payments; a copy of last year's tax returns; and a check or deposit slip for direct deposit. For more specific information, call one of the tax preparation sites.

Free tax help also is available for people who speak Spanish, Russian, Japanese and Korean. For more information on how to get tax help in those languages, or to volunteer as a translator, call Martha Trujillo at the local United Way at 972-1703.

The coalition also is urging local businesses to attend a seminar on the Earned Income Tax Credit from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday at CitySpace on the Downtown Mall. An IRS employee will present information on how businesses can help employees figure out if they are eligible for the credit. To register, call 293-7731 no later than Tuesday.