

SCGOVHEALTH

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MEDIA NOTE: Last September, the Internal Revenue Service released information about the Registered Tax Return Preparer competencies for those who prepare tax returns for individuals and families. For more information, visit <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/index.html>.

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Free tax aid offered to help people file for valuable tax credits

Free tax aid is available at locations throughout Sarasota County for quick filing of federal individual income tax returns at AARP tax aid sites and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites.

Residents who earned \$50,000 or less last year can use the VITA tax aid sites in Sarasota County. There are no income limits or age limits at the AARP sites. This service is not for business returns or complex tax issues.

The United Way of Sarasota County will operate six VITA sites in Sarasota County as part of a coordinated effort between the United Way's Financial Stability Partnership and the Sarasota County Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Task Force. The goal is to help ensure that residents who are eligible for the various tax credits receive their earned share. The other 10 tax aid sites will be operated by the AARP Foundation. There are no appointments at the AARP or VITA sites.

Both the AARP and VITA free tax sites allow residents to electronically file their tax returns so they can receive refunds sooner, if eligible. Generally, a refund can be posted to a person's bank account within seven to 10 days after the visit to one of the AARP or VITA sites. Trained IRS-certified volunteers will be at each location to provide free personal income tax assistance to EITC-eligible residents and older adults (some guidelines apply). Services include responding to questions; assisting eligible persons, including older adults, in filing their taxes; and support in reporting and receiving the benefit of all available and eligible credits, including the EITC and Child Tax Credit.

Many people will qualify for the EITC for the first time because their income declined, their marital status changed or they added children to their families. Families with three or more children also get an extra boost with a larger EITC this year. The EITC can make life a little easier for workers struggling to make ends meet in today's tight economy—up to \$5,751 in earned income tax credits. Yet, the Internal Revenue Service estimates one in four eligible taxpayers could miss out on this valuable tax credit.

Persons who earned \$50,000 or less from wages or self-employment in 2011 are encouraged to see if they qualify. Eligible taxpayers can get their EITC only if they file federal income tax returns – even if they are not otherwise required to file – and specifically claim the credit.

Taxpayers should bring the following to help determine their EITC eligibility and to help prepare their tax returns:

- photo identification
- total paid for day care
- valid Social Security cards for the taxpayer, spouse and dependents
- birth dates for primary, secondary and dependents on the tax return
- current year's tax package, if received
- wage and earning statement(s) Forms W-2, W-2G or 1099-R from all employers
- interest and dividend statements from banks (Form 1099)
- Form 1098, mortgage interest/property tax information, if applicable
- a copy of last year's federal and state returns, if available
- bank routing numbers and account numbers for direct deposit
- other relevant information about income and expenses
- total paid for day care
- day care provider's taxpayer identifying number.

The Sarasota County Commission issued a proclamation recognizing February as Sarasota County Tax Credit Awareness Month. Since these tax credits also are generally spent locally, this helps to improve the county's economy. In addition, this valuable service helps older residents and middle-income and lower-income residents who either need assistance in filing their taxes or who need to consult on a tax issue.

For more information, including a link to online EITC filing, visit the Sarasota County government website at www.scgov.net. If you do not have computer access, call United Way 2-1-1 of Manasota Inc. by dialing 211 for more information. Those with mobile or pay phones should call 941-308-4357.

All VITA tax aid sites are currently open. There are no appointments, but walk-ins are welcome at all locations. Local AARP and VITA tax aid e-file sites and their hours are as follows:

SARASOTA

Monday-Thursday, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. (starting Feb. 1)
Fruitville Library
100 Coburn Road

Mondays starting Jan. 31, 3-7 p.m.; Thursdays, 1-4 p.m.; Saturdays, 10 a.m.-1 p.m.*
*Last return will be started by 12:30 p.m. on Saturdays.

Gulf Gate Library
7112 Curtiss Ave.

Monday-Thursday, 2-6 p.m. (starting Feb. 1)
Selby Library
1331 First St.

Tuesdays, 9 a.m.-2 p.m.
Senior Friendship Center
1888 Brother Geenen Way

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 4-8 p.m. (through April 17)
Saturdays, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Sarasota County United Way Building (VITA site)
1445 Second St.

Tuesdays, 10 a.m.- 2 p.m.
Newtown - Janie's Garden (VITA site)
2350 Central Ave.

Wednesdays 3-7 p.m.
Newtown – Gore Court Portable
1700 Gore Court

LAUREL / NOKOMIS

Wednesdays, 3-7 p.m. (through April 11)
Laurel Park Community Center (VITA site)
509 Collins Road

VENICE

Fridays, 1-4:30 p.m. (opens Feb. 4)
Bay Indies Park
950 Ridgewood Ave.

Mondays and Wednesdays, 10 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. (opens Jan. 31)
Closed Monday, Feb. 21, for Presidents Day
Jacaranda Library
4143 Woodmere Blvd.

Wednesdays, 4-8 p.m.; Saturdays, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. (through April 14)

South County Family YMCA (VITA site), Venice Branch boardroom
701 Center Road

Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.; Thursdays, 11 a.m.-7 p.m.
(opens Feb. 1)
Venice Community Center
326 S. Nokomis Ave.

ENGLEWOOD

Mondays-Wednesdays, 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Sun Trust Bank
333 S. Indiana Ave.

NORTH PORT

Mondays, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. (opens Jan. 31)
Holiday Park Recreation Center (Recreation Hall)
5401 Holiday Park Blvd.

Wednesdays and Thursdays, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
Fridays, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.
North Port City Hall
4970 City Hall Blvd.

Thursdays, 5-8:30 p.m.; and Saturdays, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. (VITA site)
(available through April 14)
North Port Family Service Center, Social Services
6919 Outreach Way

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