**Estes Park Nonprofit Resource Center**

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**Image: Volunteer Thank you.tiff**

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**Volunteer Spotlight: AARP Tax-Aides Giving Back In Estes**

April is Volunteer Month. There are scores of individuals and groups of volunteers that should be thanked and congratulated for their tireless service to our community. EPNRC would like to shine a spotlight on one group that is active this time of year: the AARP tax preparation volunteers. There is a good deal of training and policy and procedure that must be observed to do this job. Also, quite a bit of thoughtful time spent inside numbers and new problems to solve.

EPNRC spoke with Don Bryson, who is in his 12th year of service (he aims to get to at least 15 years). Bryson trains other tax-aides, meets with individuals to prepare their taxes, and makes sure the whole operation stays glued together. He shared with EPNRC how it all works.

**How many volunteers are trained? It seems like there is significant retention of volunteers year-over-year.**

This year, we had 18 certified counselors who participated in various roles in completing tax returns. Retention is high, because we enjoy providing the service to the community. Some try it and find it's not for them and don't stay long. Currently we have five volunteers with over ten years of service.

**It seems like, in a town of highly educated retirees, this might be a stimulating volunteer opportunity. What sort of training do you require volunteers to go through? What sort of experience do most of them bring to the table?**

There are no experience requirements. We do have a few with accounting backgrounds, most have some technical background or are comfortable with numbers and detail oriented. Many decide to volunteer because they are used to doing their own tax returns and want to do it for others. Most years, we put out the word to recruit new people, as we are aware there are always new people moving in that may have the interest and aptitude to join us.

Each year, we provide a series of training classes (generally in January) preparing each volunteer for IRS certification. This training includes simple tests for Standards of Conduct and Interview/Review requirements. Then, there is a more challenging tax proficiency test that is oriented to only what tax issues volunteers are allowed to do in tax returns.

**How many hours a week do most volunteers work?**

Traditionally in Estes Park, our volunteers work an average of 2 days a week, totaling about 10 hours. Some of us like to take a few weeks off this time of year to get away, and we usually have enough people to cover.

**Who is this service for?**

Although Tax-Aide service may be aimed at the elderly and low income, there are no age or income restrictions for our services in Estes. Community members can book an appointment via estesvalleylibrary.org.

**Do you have higher demand than supply of volunteers?**

Before COVID, we were approaching filing 400 returns in a tax season. Last year, the Library had to close for COVID and we halted service with only about 250 returns filed. This year, it looks like we will be between 250 and 300. We always have appointment space available.

**Doing someone’s taxes is a LOT of work and brain power. That is a big give. What do most volunteers “get” out of this?**

It is all about serving people in the community. The reward is when we are told over and over how much our services are appreciated. We are not allowed to accept donations, tips, etc (we have accepted cookies on occasion). We encourage those who want to make a donation to give to the Library Friends and Foundation or even the AARP Foundation.

**Other than volunteers, what other elements does this program rely on for success?**

This program would not be as successful without the Estes Valley Library. Space is provided to us and the Library staff have supported us by making taxpayer appointments and handing out packets. This partnership began in 2005 using library computers and internet connections. Today we use our own equipment but still access the internet securely through the Library system.

The AARP Foundation, the non-profit arm of AARP, is essential. The Foundation offers a variety of programs, and most do not require AARP membership. The Tax-Aide program has existed over 50 years with the support of grants and donations from government, corporations, and private citizens. They provide all our equipment (computers, printers and supplies) plus training materials to supplement standard IRS publications. The volunteer organization starts at our national HQ in DC with the country divided into regions, states, districts, then sites like Estes Park. Colorado has had about 45 sites. The Estes Park site has performed extremely well when compared to early statistics from other states and within Colorado.

**Is there a party at the end??**

I hope so because we all need it! Usually, we do an after-tax meal somewhere to tell stories, compare experiences, learn about our site statistics, and have real fun together.

*A big, gracious thank you to the AARP Tax-Aids and all the other volunteers out there giving their time and talents.*

*EPNRC started a Facebook group that allows organizations to post opportunities and individuals to offer help. Join @estesvolunteers to be part of this local exchange.*

*Still need to finish your taxes? You can donate a portion or all of your state tax refund to a charitable organization. Visit epnonprofit.org to find a list of local eligible agencies and their Secretary of State ID number.*