

Record 17 BC3 students volunteer over holiday break to aid local families

“We are all here to help each other out,” accounting major says

Dec. 20, 2017



Tim Kramer, of Slippery Rock, an accounting major at Butler County Community College, is shown during a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance training session Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2017, on BC3's main campus in Butler Township. At left is BC3 accounting and business administration major June Cessna, of Home, Indiana County.

(Butler, PA) A record 17 Butler County Community College accounting and business administration students volunteered 16 hours during their holiday break to learn to prepare taxes for those in low- to moderate-income households in Butler and Armstrong counties, and once certified, plan to volunteer during tax season with the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program.

The number of BC3 students volunteering for VITA is also more than double that of last year, said Jean Bowen, VITA coordinator for the Center for Community Resources in Butler for eight years. The national program has existed in Butler County for 13 years, she said.

Volunteers working in VITA offices in Butler, Cranberry Township, Slippery Rock and West Hills near Kittanning last year prepared 2,322 state and federal returns free for those whose household income is below \$50,000, Bowen said, adding that \$3 million in refunds and credits were realized.

BC3 students on Tuesday faced a four-hour exam to become certified to assist Butler County residents who qualify for VITA assistance, Bowen said.

“This,” Bowen said, “speaks volumes about BC3 students. This is about students who want to help the community and it shows they have a big heart.”

Many of the students have taken BC3 instructor Laura Wiest’s financial accounting, managerial accounting and income taxation courses.

“These students,” Wiest said, “could be working, shopping, relaxing after just finishing their fall semester or sleeping.”

Final exams ended Thursday at BC3.

Students on Monday and Tuesday trained eight hours on the Earned Income Tax Credit, for employed people with low to moderate income; the Credit for Child and Dependent Care, for those with a qualifying child; itemized deductions, which allow taxpayers to reduce their taxable income based on specific personal expenses; and how to assist a taxpayer who owes the IRS.

“BC3 students think this is important”

Those who pass the multiple-choice and calculations test will be certified to prepare basic VITA returns, Bowen said, adding that in her eight years of working with BC3 students, 99 percent of the volunteers were successful on the exam. Among the 17 students, three returned from last tax season for advanced training. Those students will be able to reconcile Affordable Care Act premiums, more complicated returns and review others’ prepared returns.

“BC3 students think this is important,” Wiest said. “Not only are they on break, some of them took off work to be able to learn this to volunteer to help others. And most of these are hourly workers, not salaried workers.

“I have phenomenal students and they want to serve others.”



Annmarie Moore, of New Castle, foreground, a business administration major at Butler County Community College, is shown during a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance training session Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2017, on BC3's main campus in Butler Township.

Among them, Tim Kramer and Annmarie Moore.

Kramer, 33, of Slippery Rock, is a BC3 accounting major who plans to graduate in May.

"For low-income people, money can be tight," he said.

A tax return involving the Earned Income Tax Credit could cost a client up to \$300, Bowen said.

"Anything you can do to help them out is extra money in their pocket," Kramer said. "It's pretty awesome that we have 17 BC3 students here. It shows they are good people who are willing to help out anyone. We all help each other out. That's like BC3 in general. We are all here to help each other out."

BC3 students "care about the community"

Moore, 20, of New Castle, is a business administration major who intends to graduate in summer 2018 and one day become a certified public accountant at a "big firm."

She plans to volunteer at VITA's office at the Center for Community Resources, 212-214 S. Main St., Butler, during tax season.

BC3 students, Moore said, "care about the community and want to give back. We can help others with the abilities that we have."

A second session for additional BC3 students is planned for Jan. 5-6.

Those who seek to have their returns completed by VITA should dial 211 and schedule an appointment after Jan. 15, Bowen said. The IRS tax deadline is April 17.