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STETSON UNIVERSITY

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Stetson University: Taxpayers Get Taxes Done Free

Student volunteers assist public through VITA

DELAND, Fla., Jan. 29, 2018 – Stetson University School of Business Administration announced today that the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program will be offered on the DeLand campus to eligible tax payers Feb. 1-Apr. 13. Taxpayers with income below \$54,000 may make an appointment to have a free basic income tax return completed and filed electronically by trained student volunteers.

Taxpayers with disabilities and with limited English skills who meet the income limit are also welcome to make an appointment. In addition to the income limit, VITA does not prepare returns involving rental properties, military combat pay, or foreign earned income. Other limitations may also apply.

Co-sponsored by the United Way of Volusia-Flagler counties, Stetson's M.E. Rinker, Sr. Institute of Tax and Accountancy and Stetson's Center for Community Engagement, the VITA program has nearly 60 students registered to become certified VITA volunteers this year. Each tax return is reviewed for quality control by the VITA site coordinator, a student assistant site coordinator, or a member of Stetson's Accounting Advisory Board. Board members donate their time and expertise to serve as mentors to the student tax preparers.

"This program is vital to low-income families in our community because it helps them receive their refund quickly and allows them to keep every hard-earned dollar, some of which would otherwise be spent on tax preparation and filing," said Valrie Chambers, Ph.D., CPA, associate professor of taxation and accounting at Stetson.

In 2016, the Stetson VITA program celebrated \$1 million in tax refunds secured over the program's past six years and anticipates celebrating \$1.5 million in refunds in 2018.

Bonnie Holloway, a visiting lecturer in accounting in the School of Business Administration, serves as site coordinator for Stetson's VITA program. She trains the volunteers and oversees the day-to-day operations of the site. Just last year she led the team to complete 358 returns (for the 2016 filing season) that totaled approximately \$386,868 in tax refunds for local families.

“This program is mutually beneficial for taxpayers and students,” said Holloway. “Students gain hands-on experience in tax preparation while learning the importance of people skills as they interact and communicate with community clients.”

Taxpayers seeking assistance at the Stetson site must make an appointment, and, upon arrival present valid photo identification and a social security card. Additional recommended documentation includes items such as a copy of their 2016 tax returns, if available, W-2 forms, and bank account information.

Appointments must be made prior to arrival by calling 211 and following the phone tree prompts or by calling the United Way at 386-275-1939 and requesting a VITA appointment. Return preparation days at Stetson are scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6-8 p.m. and Fridays from noon-2 p.m. The tax preparation site is located in room 322 of the Lynn Business Center, 345 N. Woodland Blvd., DeLand, Fla., 32723.

About Stetson University

Founded in 1883, [Stetson University](#) is the oldest private university in Florida, providing a transforming education in the liberal arts tradition. Stetson stresses academic excellence and community-engaged learning, and consistently earns high marks in national rankings. Stetson encourages its students to go beyond success to significance in their lives, the lives of others and their communities. [Stay connected](#) with Stetson on social media.

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