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BARKSDALE AIR FORCE BASE — The 2012 tax return season is quickly approaching. The Barksdale Tax Assistance Program, and its volunteers, is gearing up to assist Team Barksdale.

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program is scheduled to begin Jan. 21, and is open to qualifying service members and dependents seeking assistance with their personal income taxes. Trained volunteers assist customers in completing and filing their returns electronically.

Last year, VITA returned nearly $3.2 million in federal refunds, and saved Team Barksdale and their families $297,075 in tax preparation fees.

"One of our jobs, as an Air Force legal office, is to provide service members both active duty and retirees and their dependents with legal assistance," said Tech. Sgt. Geoffery Gunn, 2nd Bomb Wing Staff Judge Advocate, NCO in charge of general law. "One of the ways we do that is through the tax center."

The Barksdale Tax center is located at building T-4561, and will begin scheduling appointments Jan. 14. Customers will be seen by appointment only Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Walk-ins are welcome Tuesday and Thursday from 8-11 a.m. and 1-4 p.m.

"Historically, the Barksdale VITA program has been successful every year, but its continued success depends on the help of the Barksdale community," said Capt. Anna Magazinnik, 2nd Bomb Wing Staff Judge Advocate contract and environmental law chief. "The key to the program's success is the dedicated staff of volunteers who give their time to assist our community with their tax preparation."

Each year, the VITA program seeks a minimum of two volunteers from every squadron, with the preferred number of volunteers being one for every 75 unit members. No prior tax knowledge is necessary.

"Volunteering to prepare taxes is an opportunity to provide a valuable service to our military

community for free," said Gunn. "Preparing taxes requires a willingness to learn and understand tax law mixed with patience. The tax center welcomes volunteers who possess these attributes."

Volunteers will be trained and certified in tax preparation by the IRS. Training is scheduled for Jan. 7-11, and will be held at the Base Education Center. Volunteers should be prepared to provide a minimum of three hours per week through the tax season, January - April. Community members should bring all of their applicable tax documents and the social security cards for everyone included in their tax return.

To schedule an appointment, contact the tax center at 456-4765 on or after Jan. 14.

Those interested in volunteering for VITA should let their supervisors know, and contact Tech. Sgt. Geoffery Gunn at geoffery.gunn@us.af.mil. Volunteer names are due by Dec. 16, and details on the training program and schedule will be sent to volunteers. Airmen of any grade, their dependents, as well as civilians and retirees, are eligible to volunteer.