

City of Lewiston, Maine Press Statement

February 1, 2021

LEWISTON: The Lewiston Auburn CA\$H Coalition, an annual tax season go-to within the LA area, has gone *“virtual.”*

IRS tax law certified volunteers have prepared taxes, free of charge, for low-to-moderate income individuals/families since 2004 when the City of Lewiston established the multi-partner coalition. However, to adhere to CDC public health pre-cautions and avoid any shut-down mid-season due to COVID19, coalition members in Maine’s ten coalitions have diligently collaborated to put a virtual model in place. Tony Tenneson, a retired professor with vast tax return experience, will facilitate the local effort as Site Coordinator.

Site Coordinator Tony Tenneson notes, *“I understand that some residents will be concerned about having their tax returns prepared virtually. The VITA program has a strict protocol for the virtual tax preparation process. Every VITA volunteer has been trained and certified for the virtual tax return process. The IRS has strict guidelines for ensuring the security and confidentiality of tax filer identification and tax information during the virtual process. IRS tax law certified volunteers will contact the individual at various times during the process, from the intake of the tax information through the review of the completed return with the resident. The process is every bit as secure as face to face. I am excited, as this will not limit the number of residents who can be served this season. In the past, the number of taxpayers served was limited to the number of appointments that could be scheduled for face-to-face tax preparation at the Armory.”*

Starting today, February 1, 2021, residents in the Lewiston, Auburn, and surrounding areas have the opportunity to choose one of two options to have their taxes prepared. A 100% virtual experience, with personal uploading of tax documents and photo ID, will be done through **“Get Your Refund”** at www.getyourrefund.org/lamaine or **“Scan & Go,”** whereby residents can go to www.lewistonmaine.gov/scanandgo to request scanning of their documents prior

to virtual tax prep. LA's Scan & Go Coordinator is Chris Adler, a long-time member of LA CA\$H.

Although use of the links is available on 2/1/21 to start the virtual process, residents should be aware that returns are not being accepted by the IRS until February 12th, so completed returns by the IRS tax law certified volunteers cannot be physically e-filed until then.

Step-by-step instructions for each of the above links can be found at www.lewistonmaine.gov/freetaxes or via the attached flyer (PDF and Word). Services will be offered through mid-April.

During both processes, communication with CA\$H representatives will be either by phone or email, and the popular free annual financial check-up will also occur. Those who use Scan & Go will have a brief in-person scanning appointment at the Lewiston Memorial Armory and can be assured that PPE will be on site, to include Plexiglass service shields. A mask will be required for entry, and six-foot social distancing will be in effect. No walk-ins will be served.

Face-to-face tax preparation **will not occur** this tax season, and the well-known ***"call in for an appointment line"*** has a message stating that calls to that # will not be returned and to please not leave a message. The two links above are the **only methods** through which LA CA\$H will be serving residents this tax season.

Residents should also be aware that filers will be able to choose—due to employment possibly being interrupted by COVID19--whether they want to use either their 2019 or 2020 earned income to calculate the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and Additional Child Tax Credit, thanks to a one-time ***"LOOKBACK"*** IRS provision

In addition, LA CA\$H Coalition Chair Dottie Perham-Whittier reminds non-local residents that other coalitions throughout Maine are ready to assist them; locations can be found at www.cashmaine.org

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