

Free tax prep offered to some

BY SANDRA ISLEY
THE CHRONICLE

"Building My Future," a campaign that provides free tax preparation for low- to moderate-income families and individuals in Winston-Salem, began offering services this week.

As part of the Earned Income Tax Credit and Volunteer Income Tax programs, the campaign will have volunteer tax preparers at 12 different locations throughout Forsyth County. The campaign has been in effect for the past four years. Last year, 2,500 families utilized its services.

The main goal of the campaign is to keep as much of the money as it can within the families where it is needed most. By offering the services for free, it helps low-income families to avoid fees that are incurred by others offering tax preparation services.

Another way that the program is helping families receive bigger tax returns this year is by making sure that those who qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit will receive the additional revenue.

"We want to make sure that people who qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit will receive that back in their tax refund," said Laura Elliott, marketing specialist at Experiment in Self-Reliance. "They (low-income working families) can potentially receive up to \$4,000 back on their taxes, so we wanted to make sure anyone who is eligible for that knows about it and claims it on their taxes."

According to Elliott, a lot of people do not know about the EITC, and that's part of the reason why millions of dollars go unclaimed every year when people are filing tax returns. This is extra income that Elliott feels will benefit everyone. "It's also good for the whole community. It ben-

efits not only the families who get it back, but the local economy as well," said Elliott.

Tax preparation is not the only service provided by the campaign. The tax preparation clinics look to educate recipients of their services about asset-building. They want to encourage the families to use part of their refunds to set up savings accounts, invest in first-time homeownership or other long-term financial opportunities that will prove to be beneficial to their families' incomes.



Elliott

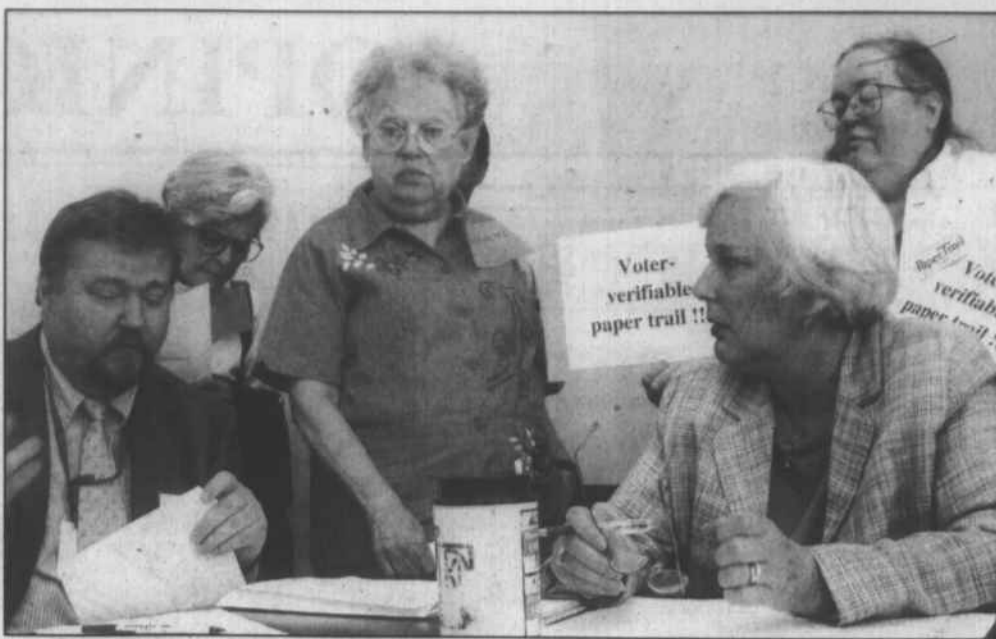
"Once people get the money back, we also want to give them information and education about what's available, so that they can do things with the money that helps support their family over the long term. It will be positive for the future if they didn't spend the money right away, so we encourage asset building," Elliott said.

Sponsored by Forsyth Working Families Partnership, Building My Future is a collaboration of several nonprofit organizations working together through various grants. Some of those organizations are ESR, the Department of Social Services, and United Way. Wake Forest and Winston-Salem State Universities are also participants in the program.

Among the 12 sites that are offering the services are the Downtown Health Plaza and Goodwill Industries. The DHP is geared toward the Latino/Hispanic community because of its availability of Spanish interpreters on site.

Services will be available through tax season, but locations and times vary between now and April 15. For more information on locations of tax sites and operational hours, call First Line at 727-8100 or United Way's 211 line.

Community activists hold signs advocating for voting machines that leave paper trails during a Board of Elections meeting. Seated are Kathie Chastain Cooper and BOE member Eric Elliott.



Group calls for black elections leader

BY T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE

The Black Leadership Roundtable wants Forsyth County's next director of elections to be community-minded, capable and African-American.

State Rep. Larry Womble, one of the Roundtable's most visible members, told a crowd of dozens at a community forum last week that the Roundtable, a grassroots community advocacy organization, would do all it could to push for Forsyth County's first black elections director.

"If we don't try, we are not going to get (an African-American director)," Womble said.

Womble and others are betting that a black elections leader would be more sensitive to the needs of the community in general and African-Americans in particular.

Kathie Chastain Cooper, the current director, will retire this week and then begin a new job as a regional director for the State Board of Elections.

Black community leaders and voting rights advocates have butted heads with Chastain Cooper during her 30-

year tenure as elections director. Chastain Cooper's relationship with some people has been so testy that several forum audience members applauded when Womble announced Chastain Cooper's impending retirement.

"We need someone there that is going to be sensitive to the concerns of the voting people," Womble said.

In recent years, some have accused Chastain Cooper of not doing all she could to encourage voting.

Five years ago, Chastain Cooper argued against setting up additional early-voting sites throughout the county. Community groups said additional early-voting sites would increase voter turnout in a critical presidential election year by giving residents more convenience and accessibility to polls. Chastain Cooper argued that setting up additional sites on short notice would put her staff at a disadvantage. The three-member Board of Elections eventually voted for the additional sites.

Last year, dozens of people packed a Board of Elections meeting to complain about what they called citizens' lack of access to Board of Elections meetings. Among the complaints were that minutes from board meetings were not being posted online in a timely man-

ner and that some staffers in the elections office were rude and not helpful.

Linda Sutton, the head of the Winston-Salem Voting Rights Coalition and the convener of the Roundtable, said she can't remember when she has not had concerns about Chastain Cooper and her office.

"We have always had to fight them," said Sutton, who recalled a brouhaha 20 years ago when she says students at Winston-Salem State University were turned away from registering to vote.

"We have just had a lot of problems," Chastain Cooper denied that her relationship with some in the community has been contentious over the years.

She said problems have arisen when some have pushed for her office to get bogged down in partisan politics - something she says no elections office should get wrapped up in.

"You can't get involved in a political situation," she said.

Some have charged that Chastain Cooper, a registered Republican, has more closely aligned herself with the only Republican member of the Board of Elections, John Redding. Chastain Cooper, though, said politics has never come into play on her watch as

director. "I feel the director's role is to express what is best for county citizens," she said.

The county is currently advertising for the next director. Chastain Cooper said she believes there are some on her staff who are qualified for the job. She said she did not know whether they would apply for the position.

The African-American Caucus of the Forsyth County Democratic Party released a statement Tuesday saying that the job should not go to Laura Gerardi-Dell, the current deputy director.

The statement says that Gerardi-Dell worked with Cooper to "make the BOE an unfriendly environment for African Americans voters."

"The new leader of the BOE must have the trust and respect of all the people of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County," the statement reads.

Joan Cardwell, the chairperson of the Forsyth County Board of Elections, said last week that the board would carefully consider each applicant before hiring Chastain Cooper's replacement.

Cardwell, who is African-American, had no comment when asked about the Roundtable's desire to have an African-American director. Chastain Cooper's retirement will become effective tomorrow.



Cardwell



File Photo

Floy Howie was a dedicated member of the Roundtable. She passed away earlier this month. Last week's forum was dedicated to her.

Roundtable

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Leadership Roundtable also had a CAT-TV show, which the group used to publicize its projects and events.

Half of the City Council members Dan Besse, Joycelyn Johnson, Evelyn Terry and Nelson Malloy - was in the room when Allah made his remarks. After the meeting, Terry, who joined the council last month, said she has not given much thought to CAT-TV because she is focused on economic development and jobs.

Terry isn't alone. Several forum speakers addressed their own concerns about jobs and economics. Developer William Brandon urged attendees to put their money where their mouths are by supporting black businesses. "We need to make the playing field level," he said.

Other issues that were raised ran the gamut. One woman simply had a concern that the large waste bins that the city provides for residents who agree to bring their trash to the curb are much too heavy for senior citizens to maneuver.

Natarshia Wolfe urged the Roundtable to take an active part in promoting abstinence programs in schools. Sexual education programs, she said, have been to the detriment of African-American youths.

Someone else complained that there was a lack of eateries in East Winston where residents of the area could find healthy, nutritious meals.

The more-than-two-hour forum provided merely a venue

for residents to sound off about issues that concern them. There was no debating of the issues and few answers were provided. Roundtable officials say many of the issues that were brought up will be hashed out thoroughly in a community-issues workshop that could take place as early as March.

"We heard your hurt, and we heard your pain," said Linda Sutton, the Roundtable's convener. "And, trust me, we

feel it." The forum was dedicated in memory of Floy Howie, an original member of the Roundtable who passed away earlier this month. Howie, who led the organization's education committee, seldom missed Roundtable meetings and events before she took ill several years ago. State Rep. Larry Womble called her the "heart and soul of the Roundtable."

Successful Aging: Step Into a Healthy Lifestyle This New Year

Wake Forest University is conducting a research study that focuses on lifestyles for successful aging. The Cooperative Lifestyle Intervention Program (CLIP) is looking for participants between the ages of 60-79 years who are overweight and are willing to join a healthy lifestyle change program for 18 months. If you qualify for the study, you will be assigned by chance to one of three intervention groups: Successful Aging, Physical Activity, or Physical Activity/Weight Loss. You will receive reimbursement for gas, regular medical tests at no cost to you, important information about your blood sugar, blood pressure, level of body fat, and much more. Come join us for a new beginning!

If interested or for more information, please call Christie Williams, at 336-758-3781.



BG05-542

February One is a tribute to the four A&T freshmen who envisioned and began the lunch counter sit-in on February 1, 1960. Their non-violent, courageous act against social injustice inspired similar movements across the nation and is a defining moment in civil rights history.

Stand up and be counted. Join a rich 115-year tradition of uncompromising excellence and unparalleled commitment.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2006

46th Sit-In Anniversary Breakfast Celebration
Keynote Speaker: Rev. Calvin Butts
Abyssinian Baptist Church, NY - 6:30 a.m.
Williams Cafeteria
N.C. A&T State University Campus
Contact: Dr. Judy Rashid 336.334-7791

Round Table Discussion
Speakers: A&T Four - 3 p.m.
Memorial Union-Stallings Ballroom
N.C. A&T State University Campus
Contact: Dr. Judy Rashid 336.334-7791

International Civil Rights Center & Museum Sit-In Banquet
Speaker: Ambassador Andrew Young - 6 p.m.
Koury Convention Center Four Seasons Hotel - Guilford Ballroom
For more info: 336.274.9199

Dr. Cornell West Lecture co-sponsored by N.C. A&T Honors Program
Student Government "Think Tank,"
February 3 at 7 p.m.
N.C. A&T Alumni-Foundation Event Center
For more info: 336.256.2058