

## Volunteer Tax Counselor Likes Tackling 'Figures'

BY SUSAN USHER

Larry Nielsen of Boiling Spring Lakes could be a role model for younger retirees, or anyone else, for that matter.

While the billboard that initially drew his attention to the lakefront community suggested spending retirement lying in bed, he's done anything but since moving to Brunswick County 19 years ago.

Nielsen and his late wife discovered Boiling Spring Lakes around 1970, while on a coast-to-coast search for a good place to live upon his retirement from The Simmons Company after 42 years of service.

On their way home to New Jersey from an exploratory trip to Florida (which they didn't like), they were headed up U.S. 17 when they saw a sign promoting the retirement community. They turned off onto N.C. 87 and took the tour. Not long after that, they learned that a house they had noticed on the tour—a log cabin vacation home—was on the market. They bought it, along with two adjoining lots for privacy, though at that time the cabin was the only house on Tate Lake Drive.

Nielsen hasn't slowed down since moving here in February 1971. "I've got to be busy. I can't be sitting down all day," he says.

A spry 84 years of age, Nielsen walks rather than rides the course at Fox Squirrel Country Club, where he has accumulated a considerable collection of trophies. He plays golf and bridge, keeps house, works in the yard, rides his bicycle, tutors for the Brunswick County Literacy Council.

And, from February through mid-April, he volunteers to help people prepare their state and federal tax forms.

"I love it! I just love it!" the retired cost accountant said in a recent interview at his home overlooking a modest but beautiful Tate Lake. "I could do it all day long and all year long. I like figures."

Nielsen's had the chance to become a professional tax preparer, for pay. "But I don't need the money," he pointed out. "I'd rather do it this way."

It was a genuine zest for living and a love for working with numbers that led him to respond nine years ago to a flyer sent out by the American Association of Retired Persons seeking tax counseling volunteers for its Tax-Aide program.

*"Most of them are afraid of the figures. I'm just tickled to death to help."*

—Larry Nielsen  
Volunteer Tax Counselor

Nielsen became the county's first Tax-Aide volunteer, though the AARP has offered the program nationwide for approximately 15 years.

This year he's one of nine volunteers in the program, which offers free tax assistance at three locations in the county from Feb. 1 through April 12.

John Angermayer of Southport recently took over the program coordinator's post from Nielsen, on his request. "I'd rather do the actual counseling than all the bookkeeping work. I like working with the figures," said Nielsen.

However, he does serve as instructor for the local volunteer corps—and for a part reason of his own. Only the coordinator and instructor get to go to Greensboro each December for a week-long training seminar. The instructor then comes back and trains the other volunteers. "They keep us up to date. They go over the tax structure every year. It's a good deal," said Nielsen.

Presently volunteers offer taxpayers assistance in Southport and Shallotte two half-days each week, and by appointment only, Wednesday mornings at the local community college.

"We could use more volunteers," said Nielsen. "If we had more we could have more days."

Each volunteer in the program receives training each year and must pass a test. "It's quite elaborate," Nielsen said. "The people we have are very, very good." Those volunteers, in addition to Angermayer and Nielsen, include Norma Buckbee, Charles Neville, Burt Myers, Charles Saunders, Jerry Jaiell, and in the Shallotte area, Bernice Ellwood and Eilene Crane of Calabash.

Volunteers agree to provide 40 hours of their time, approximately four hours once each week for 10 weeks. However, Nielsen and Angermayer put in many more



STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

**TAX-AIDE VOLUNTEER Larry Nielsen likes "figures" and helping people. For the next 10 weeks, he and eight other volunteers are available to help explain tax laws and tax forms, and to assist in preparing forms.**

hours—because they enjoy it. While most volunteers work out of one location, Nielsen makes the rounds—working in Supply and Shallotte, and also in Southport, if needed there.

Demand for their services varies. Last year the group helped 158 people with their taxes, helping most fill out forms and answering questions posed by the balance. Surprisingly, Nielsen said the first few weeks were the busiest. He has a theory as to why. "Most of the people we help are elderly," he said. "I think elderly people like to get things done in advance. They want to get things out of the way."

Still, there are moments when the vol-

unteers are incredibly busy. Nielsen recalls one day when the Shallotte site has had four or five volunteers working at the same time and still be "just swamped." Demand for services is higher in the Shallotte and Bolivia areas than in Southport, where the taxpayer turn-out has been disappointingly small ever since the program began.

Help is offered at a first-come, first-served basis at the Southport and Shallotte sites, and by appointment at Brunswick Community College. Taxpayers seeking assistance can expect the work session to last a full hour if both state and federal taxes are prepared.

Anyone seeking help is asked to have

with them their 1990 state and federal tax forms; copies of their completed 1989 returns, W-2 forms, 1099 forms and any other information related to income received during the past year.

Nielsen said many of the people he's helped in the past have some knowledge of the benefits to which they might be entitled and probably could have prepared their own returns. "But they're afraid to tackle it; most of them are afraid of the figures," he continued. "And I'm just tickled to death to help."

While most of the forms taxpayers bring in are the basic state and federal forms, sometimes the problems are more exotic. Then, said Nielsen, it's up to the volunteer whether to attempt to assist the taxpayer. Shaking his head in admiration, he added, "Those girls down at Shallotte—they will tackle anything. They're just great!"

So far, when confronted with anything out of the ordinary the volunteer corps has been fortunate, he said. "We've had someone who understood that problem."

The service is aimed primarily at helping older persons understand income-tax forms and to become familiar with special benefits available to older persons. But Nielsen said the volunteers help anyone who shows up.

"Just get more people to come in," he insisted. "We'd like to be busier."

**Starting this week Tax-Aide volunteers will be available on the following schedule:**

—West Brunswick Branch Library, Shallotte, Tuesdays and Thursdays, Feb. 1 through April 12, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Walk-in.

—Brunswick Interagency Building, Brunswick Community College campus north of Supply, Wednesdays, Feb. 7-April 11, 9 a.m.-1 p.m. by appointment only. Appointments may be scheduled by calling Debbie Bryant, 754-6900, Ext. 400.

—Main Library, Southport, Tuesdays and Thursdays, Feb. 1-April 12, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Walk-in.

For more information about the service, contact Nielsen at 845-2121, or Angermayer at 457-4973.

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