

# Don't Wait Until April 14 To Hire Tax Preparer

If you are considering hiring a tax preparer, the N.C. Association of Certified Public Accountants recommends that you begin your search for the right help now. Not all tax preparers are created equal, and those that may be the most qualified to prepare your return could be unavailable if you wait until your tax return is due.

Among those who can help you prepare your return are certified public accountants (CPAs), tax attorneys and enrolled agents (individuals certified by the U.S. Treasury Department).

These are the only professionals who can represent you legally before the IRS in the event your tax return is audited.

### Determine Your Needs

To ensure that you hire the right kind of professional, consider the complexity of your tax return. Do you have a home-based business? Have you had large capital gains or losses in the last year? Did you experience a large casualty loss in the past year? Do you have rental property? If so, try to retain a tax professional who has had experience dealing with these kinds of issues.

Even if your needs are not complex, you may still find the help of a tax preparer to be cost effective if you have experienced a major lifestyle change, such as retiring, divorcing or assuming full-time care for a relative. Additionally, if you think the new tax law will result in significant changes to your tax liability, it may benefit you to obtain assistance from a tax professional.

### Shop Around

If you've never hired a tax preparer before, you can start searching for one by contacting friends and associates who may have similar incomes or be involved in similar lines of work. You can also check with your local chamber of commerce, as well as civic and church groups for

names of qualified tax professionals. Finally, ask other professionals you know, such as bankers and insurance agents, for referrals.

Once you've obtained a few names, try to call or personally interview at least three different tax preparers. This will enable you to assess differences in style, capabilities, and fee structures.

### Check Backgrounds

During the interview process, you'll want to learn as much as possible about the preparer's professional background. Find out whether the individuals work as tax preparers full-time or part-time, the number of years of experience, their level of education, and whether they participate in continuing professional education. You'll also want to ask about their memberships in professional tax associations.

Also, don't be shy about asking a prospective tax preparer for the names of clients you can contact. Find out from past clients how satisfied they were with the work performed and whether it was done in a timely manner. You may also want to ask such clients how aggressive the tax professional is and consider whether you will be comfortable with his or her style.

### Discuss Fees

The cost for preparing your tax return can range anywhere from under \$100 for a short-form return to thousands of dollars for a complicated return. Find out whether the tax preparer charges on an hourly basis, uses a lump sum, or bases the fee on the number of tax forms that need to be completed.

To assist your tax preparer in determining a fee, you may want to provide him or her with a copy of your tax return from last year, pointing out any differences in your financial or tax situation.

Beware of tax preparers who say they will base their fee on the refund

they obtain for you. Chances are these individuals may be acting improperly.

### Prepare For The Preparer

Any good tax preparer will want to find out how much you can

tribute to the tax preparation process. If you can identify the tax issues that need to be addressed and have well organized tax records, a preparer can work more efficiently and cost-effectively.

## Welcome Center Hosts 400,000

The Southeastern Welcome Center, Inc. reports that more than 400,000 travelers visited the facility in 1993.

The N.C. Department of Transportation provides monthly traffic reports which show a significant increase in traffic over 1992. The center logged 152,133 vehicles from January to December, which translates into 410,759 visitors.

Center Director Sabrina Hodges says traffic was steady from Easter to Thanksgiving, but has been slow

during the winter months. In 1993, July had the most visitors with 47,939, and December with the least, 19,996.

More than 240,000 brochures were distributed last year. Staff also assists in making hotel and ferry reservations throughout the state. There were 352 hotel reservations and 326 ferry reservations made by the welcome center staff.

In February 1994 the center will celebrate its second birthday.



### Support For Squad

Shalotte Volunteer Rescue Squad member Ray Jackson (left) accepts a donation from Ken Miller, assistant manager of the Shalotte Wal-Mart. The contribution was part of a corporate program to donate money from vending machine sales to local nonprofit organizations.

## BUSINESS BRIEFS

### Sheila Wood Recognized For Nursing Excellence

Sheila Wood, R.N., a staff nurse at The Brunswick Hospital in Supply, is one of 21 registered nurses in the Coastal Area Health Education Center region honored with an "Excellence in Nursing" award.



WOOD

The award was presented at a dinner Jan. 20 by Dennis Sherrod, director of North Carolina's Center for Nursing.

Her supervisors nominated Wood on the basis of three criteria: a minimum of three years of continuous staff nursing experience; demonstrated competence; and a short letter by Wood on excellence in nursing.

"Excellence in nursing is the unique ability to care beyond reality," Wood wrote. "While reform and change surround us, we must hold on tight to the solid foundation of caring for our fellow human beings. As we struggle to find our places in a profession of growth, we must not lose sight of or drift from the com-

mon link we have with each other. Excellence in nursing is a reflection of humanity itself."

Wood is a full-time staff member in the Emergency Services Department, but works in the Intensive Care Unit or Medical/Surgical Unit if needed. She is certified in advanced cardiac life support, basic trauma life support and pediatric advanced life support, and is a certified mobile intensive care nurse.

She has been a member of The Brunswick Hospital staff for 11 years.

### UCB Adds Networks

United Carolina Bank has announced its participation in both the Honor and Maestro point-of-sale networks.

The two programs allow customers to make purchases using their automatic teller machine (ATM) cards to deduct the amount of purchases directly from their checking accounts.

"The new POS service will enable customers to use their "ucb24" banking cards as an alternative to writing checks or using cash for the payment of purchases made at participating merchants," said UCB spokesman John F. McLaughlin.

### No More Emergency Funds For Jobless, ESC Head Says

As of last weekend, unemployed Brunswick Countians are no longer eligible for emergency unemployment insurance benefits after their regular benefits run out, said Ann O. Duncan, chairman of the state's Employment Security Commission.

The federal emergency unemployment insurance program for new claims expired Feb. 5.

"We won't be able to provide these emergency benefits to any new people," Duncan said. "Those folks already receiving benefits will be able to continue, and our regular unemployment insurance program will

run as usual."

The emergency unemployment benefits program was first passed in late 1991, and has been extended several times since then. It was intended to provide additional weeks of unemployment insurance money to people who were still unemployed when their regular benefits ran out.

In its current form, the emergency unemployment insurance program will expire for everybody April 30, 1994. In 1993, ESC paid more than \$197 million in emergency benefits, Duncan said.

## Announcing New Services From

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Harassing, threatening or obscene telephone calls make us all feel very vulnerable. If only you could trace those calls back to the originator and report the telephone number to the police.

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CALL TRACE gives back your right to privacy, peace of mind and a good night's sleep.

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End the annoyance of missed phone calls with CALL RETURN.

#### PRIORITY RINGING

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Everyone has people they always want to hear from: family, close friends, business associates, kids, grandchildren. But how do you know these "favorite" callers are calling before you answer the phone?

With PRIORITY RINGING, your phone rings with a distinctive pattern every time you get a call from someone on a special list that you prepare. All other calls ring the normal way.

And if you have CALL WAITING, you'll hear a distinctive call-waiting signal when your "favorites" call when you're on the phone.

With PRIORITY RINGING, you'll know by the ring that it's someone you want to talk to.

#### PREFERRED CALL FORWARDING

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You're away from home for the evening. You want to make sure that your sister can reach you by phone but you don't want all those calls—solicitations, etc.—to be forwarded. How do you do it?

With PREFERRED CALL FORWARDING, you decide which calls follow you and which calls will ring at your regular number.

#### CALL SCREENING

#### Tame Those Unwanted Calls

Are there some calls you'd really rather not answer? With CALL SCREENING, you can list the specific phone numbers you do not wish to receive calls from. When calls from these phone numbers come in, they will be answered with a recording. And you can add the last number that called to your list even if you don't know who it was.

CALL SCREENING helps ensure your privacy.

Also available, CALLER ID, you can decide which calls to answer with CALLER ID. A special display unit attached to your phone displays the calling number.

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