

Free tax clinic still available in Barry's Bay

By Patricia McLee

The Taxman is tapping his toe, but there's still time to file your income tax return.

In addition to local accountants and professional tax preparers, volunteers at the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) may be able to help, provided you meet the criteria.

The CVITP is a collaboration between the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and community groups across Canada, organized to allow volunteers to prepare income tax and benefit returns for free for people who have a modest income and a simple tax situation. Individual taxpayers with a maximum income of \$30,000, couples with a maximum income of \$40,000, or individuals with a child with a maximum income of \$35,000 meet the suggested family income levels. With each additional child, \$2,500 can be added to the suggested family income. Interest income must be less than \$1,000, and there are other criteria. For example, volunteers do not prepare returns for individuals who have self-employment, business or rental income.

Filing an income tax return is mandatory for all Canadians, but for anyone receiving a government benefit, filing is doubly crucial. The Ontario Trillium Benefit, the Canadian Child Tax Benefit, the HST Credit and the Senior Homeowners Property Tax Grant, for example, as well as other more comprehensive benefits, like disability pensions and Old Age Security pensions, will come to a crashing halt in June if a return is not filed.

Natalie Toppin, the local CVITP Coordinator, noted that a majority of the people who qualify for the free service will not receive refunds, but will lose benefits if they fail to file. Fees charged by professionals, which can be as high as \$80 for a single return, cannot be recouped. They are simply out-of-pocket, a slim pocket to begin with, in many cases.

Toppin started volunteering for the CVITP when she lived in Whitehorse, Yukon in 2003 and continued in Vancouver Island, then Huntsville and Napanee. When she moved to Barry's Bay two years ago and realized there was no program in place, she felt it was so important she set one up in partnership with the Opeongo Seniors Centre. Other participating organizations are Barry's Bay and Area Home Services and Ontario Works. This year the program was expanded to Killaloe and Whitney.

Tax clinics in Barry's Bay will be held at the Opeongo Seniors Centre April 27 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and April 30 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Call Diane at 613-756-2772 or email cvitp2015@gmail.com to make an appointment. If a client cannot make an appointment during the scheduled tax clinics, other arrangements may be made.

Returns are filed electronically and volunteers have access to a CRA hotline to help if there are problems with e-filing.