

By Christopher Burnett | Staff Writer

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Fort Leavenworth Tax Center opens Jan. 23

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The Fort Leavenworth Tax Assistance Center is available for appointments starting Jan. 23 for the 2016 tax season. Service members in grade E-5 or below can drop off tax documents, while higher ranking soldiers and retirees must make an appointment.

“We provide tax preparation for the year, and we give guidance about tax planning,” said Amanda Kislia, manager of the Fort Leavenworth Tax Assistance Center. “All ranks and retirees are welcome too, subject to Legal Assistance and IRS limitations.”

Kislia said the IRS requires preparers actually see a Social Security card for each person who is listed on the tax return. And, that all preparers in the office receive training from the federal and state.

“All of our preparers must pass tax training courses. The Internal Revenue Service sends a trainer who teaches a course that also covers tax issues specific to soldiers and retirees,” Kislia said. “And, the Kansas Department of Revenue sends a trainer who teaches about the state return. We processed 1,300 returns last year.”

Kislia said that the office recruits volunteers each year by attending the Post Activities Information and Registration Day, going to retiree fairs and by word-of-mouth during tax season.

“In addition to our three regular staff members, our volunteers this year include three soldiers along with the 12 hourly volunteers,” Kislia said. “We teach volunteers a skill they will use the rest of their lives.”

Ladonna Brunson, Tax Center coordinator, who has been with the office for 14 years and is also involved in training volunteers, said that it is beneficial having soldiers assist with scheduling client appointments. She said it allows her the ability to monitor office workflow.

“I’m what we call a rover. I go from cubicle to cubicle monitoring tax preparations in progress,” Brunson said. “First- and second-year preparers have someone with more experience mentoring them through the season.”

The certification testing process takes approximately eight hours to complete. The assessment covers ethics and standards of conduct, the intake, interview and quality review of a tax return, and covers basic, advanced and military tax issues.

Sgt. James Lesmeister, retention noncommissioned officer for Special Troops Battalion, is serving for the first time as a preparer.

“My job as a reviewer/ NCOIC is to make sure that all of the documents are completed correctly,” Lesmeister said. “I was detailed this duty by my unit, but the training I received will be useful for preparing my own taxes in the future. It’s been a great experience.”

Fort Leavenworth Tax Assistance Center resources are varied and include a personal point of contact at the IRS to answer any questions. The office also provides military-specific guidance for each state.

In addition to having such a comprehensive training process, Kislia said that all tax returns are reviewed at by at least six people — the preparer, the rover, the taxpayer, the reviewer, the e-filer and a preview by the IRS, set up specifically for military VITA sites.

To have tax returns prepared by the Fort Leavenworth Tax Assistance Center, the office asks that clients bring required identification, all applicable tax documents and last year’s tax return. This personal income tax service is free and is available by visiting the center at 615 McClellan Ave. or by calling 684-4986.



PHOTO/ PRUDENCE SIEBERT, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

Ladonna Brunson, Fort Leavenworth Tax Center coordinator, notes a few additions to the scope-of-service limitations information sheet, including that photo identification for taxpayers and spouses is now required by the Internal Revenue Service, Jan. 17 at the Tax Center. The Fort Leavenworth Tax Center at 615 McClellan Ave. opens Jan 23 for the 2016 tax season; hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Wednesday and Friday and from 1-4 p.m. Thursday. Call (913) 684-4986 for more information. Photo by Prudence Siebert/Fort Leavenworth Lamp

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