



Filing Those Tax Returns, With Help From the City

By [EMILY S. RUEB](#)



Emily S. Rueb/The
Lyndon Horsken, a certified tax preparer, helped Dean George file his taxes through a new city program at a community center in Brooklyn.



As rain and wind pelted Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn on Saturday, Julitta Joseph, 66, a sales associate at a Kohl's department store, lugged a small black rolling suitcase up a flight of stairs to the office of a social-services nonprofit.

She installed herself at a folding table in a small corner room and unzipped her case, pulling out a small plastic shopping bag shielding a tidy manila folder. She carefully opened the envelope to reveal a stack of papers, including a torn, purple bulletin-board flier advertising a new city new initiative that helps low-income New Yorkers file their taxes online for free.

She fished out of the folder her previous tax returns and her W2 from Kohl's, where she made \$13,700 last year, and brought them to a white-haired man. Soon he had helped her make the leap from Internet neophyte — she had never been online before — to online tax filer.

“It wasn’t hard, but I wouldn’t have been able to do it without his help,” said Ms. Joseph, nodding at the man, Lyndon Horsken, a tax preparer at the social service agency, [Camba](#), one of the city’s partners in the new program. “Good help.”

The city’s new Online Free Tax Prep program is halfway between a self-guided system and full-service tax preparation, which the city offers through its AARP Tax-Aide sites and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites. At the online tax preparation offices like the one at the Camba office on Eastern Parkway and Utica Avenue in Crown Heights, preparers coach people through a tax-preparation software program called the [Beehive](#), developed by One Economy Corporation, a nonprofit that specializes in engaging people to enter the economic mainstream.

The city estimates there are about 2.7 million New Yorkers making less than \$58,000 per tax return who qualify to prepare and electronically file their tax returns for free through nyc.gov/OnlineFreeTaxPrep.

Mr. Horsken estimated that about 10 percent of the individuals he helps do not even have e-mail addresses. But he helps with more complicated questions, too. In Ms. Joseph’s case, the gross income figure given to her by the Internal Revenue Service was incorrect, and Mr. Horsken patiently waited on hold with the agency to try and troubleshoot the process.

“You try to help,” he said, “but sometimes other people’s mistakes end up getting in the way.”

Mr. Horsken and other workers and volunteers help low-income individuals apply for benefits they are entitled to, such as the New York City Child Care Tax Credit, [making work pay](#) credit and [the earned income tax credit](#), which last year returned an average of \$2,700 per individual.

“This can be the largest check they receive all year,” said the city’s consumer affairs commissioner, Jonathan B. Mintz. “The bottom line for the mayor is to make sure people are able to file their taxes and to make sure they can get every single dollar of their refunds rather than to give someone else money to get it back.” In 2007, nearly 2.5 million New Yorkers paid to have their income tax returns prepared.

As of last week, 827 individuals had filed returns at one of the offices the city is using for the online program, and 1,388 returns had been filed through the city’s Web site.

Dean George, 27, spent about an hour on one of about 20 city-issued laptops at the Camba office, even though he has a computer and an Internet connection at home. Mr. George, who has a background in graphic design, said he came in because he had “no clue about tax law or taxes.” Last year he paid for his tax return preparation, but not this year.

“I wanted to keep my \$100,” he said.

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