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Wisconsin Department of Revenue recognizes Stevens Point's Jamie Chilewski, Michelle Easton for income tax program volunteer work

The Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR) recently held its 2021 Volunteer Income Tax Assistance and Tax Counseling for the Elderly (VITA-TCE) programs volunteer awards ceremony.

Award winners Jamie Chilewski and Michelle Easton volunteer at the Stevens Point Community Action Project (CAP) Services VITA site. Chilewski has volunteered with the VITA program for four years at the Stevens Point and Portage County VITA sites. She's passionate about helping her local community, so she worked on identifying partnerships local programs could benefit from. Jamie says her employer, Simplicity Credit Union, assists with providing Jamie the opportunity to give back. Michelle Easton, also with Simplicity Credit Union, helped manage her employer's VITA volunteers for two years, with this being her first year as a VITA volunteer. She enjoys volunteering because being able to help people in even a small way makes her day.

"The VITA-TCE program is incredibly important to so many in Wisconsin, and its success is due largely to the dedication and service of program volunteers like Jamie and Michelle," DOR Secretary Peter Barca said. "It is because of Jamie, Michelle, and the nearly 600 other volunteers giving their time and talent every year that allows the VITA-TCE program to continue working for Wisconsin."

As with so many other volunteer organizations, the pandemic forced VITA-TCE program volunteers to reinvent how they serve. Switching from 100% in-person tax consulting and preparation to a virtual model at most sites challenged volunteers and staff members. With only 129 of its usual 200-plus Wisconsin sites open over a second-consecutive extended tax season, volunteers carried on processing an impressive 28,000-plus tax returns for Wisconsinites in 2021.

Jessica Wagner, CAP Services site coordinator, nominated the team of two for their hard work and perseverance during the tax season. "The Simplicity Credit Union team not only provided an important level of consistency in the program while we worked through staff transition, they went above and beyond in so many ways to adapt to this year's 'no-contact' procedures for tax return preparation," Wagner said. Wagner explained that Portage County's long-time VITA site coordinator, Tom Moss, recently passed away from cancer, making the 2021 filing season especially difficult. Additionally, the team's President/CEO Pat Wesenberg passed away in February. Wesenberg was known for being an inspirational leader and mentor. "We can't help but recognize and celebrate how the members of her Simplicity Family embody these same characteristics [as Wesenberg] through their service to the community," Wagner said.

The VITA-TCE programs offer free income tax return preparation assistance to qualifying individual taxpayers throughout Wisconsin. For more information about these programs and volunteer opportunities, visit the [Tax Assistance Programs](#) page on the DOR website.

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