



CATAWBA COUNTY

P.O. BOX 669 Newton, North Carolina 28658-0669 (828) 695-5600

Department of Social Services

PRESS RELEASE/PSA

Friday, June 15, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jo Sloan at (828) 695-5667 or jo@catawbacountync.gov

National Association of Counties Honors Catawba County Tax Link Program

A Catawba County program that provides free tax preparation services for low income families in Catawba County has been named winner of a 2007 National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Award.

The NACo Achievement Awards program, now in its 36th year, gives national recognition to significant and innovative programs which improve county organization, management and service delivery. Catawba County has won 184 awards over the history of the NACo program and has been honored during each of the program's 36 years.

"NACo awards demonstrate Catawba County's continuing effort to find innovative and creative ways to deliver the very best services to our citizens," said Kitty Barnes, Chair of the Board of Commissioners. "My fellow commissioners and I are very proud of this national recognition."

With many Catawba County families facing major financial difficulties as a result of plant shutdowns and layoffs in the county, Catawba County Social Services staff wanted to make sure these citizens were not paying too much in income taxes or fees to file their taxes. Staff learned that many low-income citizens paid tax preparers hundreds of dollars each year to file their tax forms. Others didn't know about the Earned Income Tax Credit or didn't understand their potential eligibility for it, and still others paid significant fees just to get a rapid refund when they filed their taxes.

After consulting with the Internal Revenue Service, a handful of Social Services staff established a VITA (Volunteers in Tax Assistance) site in 2005 to provide free tax assistance for low-income families. The group decided to enlist business staff/students from Catawba Valley Community College and Lenoir Rhyne College's Phi Beta Lambda to create a volunteer tax team. Catawba County Tax Link is now in its third year of operation. Today, the volunteer group has expanded to include employees and retirees from several branches of Catawba County government. The families served by Tax Link often lose up to a third of their tax return by using tax preparation services with high fees. This tax year, the 29 members of the team donated 774 hours of volunteer time to the effort, generating \$407,564 in returns for local citizens.

The Catawba Tax Link program also won a 2006 North Carolina Association of County Commissioners Outstanding County Program Award and a 2007 Acts of Caring Award from NACo. The Tax Link Program is a shining example of Catawba County's dedication to improving the lives of our citizens.

###