



“I am the EITC project manager for the VITA Program ... We apply our due diligence for the most correct and complete tax return we can do for our customers ... Dedicated to PEACE, Inc. since 2014.”

Ralph Lyke



EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO THRIVE | EST. 1968

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PLEASE TELL ME ABOUT YOUR ROLE AT PEACE, INC.

LYKE: I am the project manager for the VITA Program at the Shoppingtown Mall, which is our main hub site. We are a volunteer income tax assistance site; however, we march with the banner, “Earned Income Tax Credit You’ve Earned It!” It’s a free tax service through the Internal Revenue Service. We serve low-to-middle income taxpayers with household adjusted gross income, up to \$54,000. Our main thrust is the EITC, as it helps our customers, who have earned income.

WHY DID YOU JOIN THE PEACE, INC. ORGANIZATION?

LYKE: It was a great opportunity for me. I think - at the time - it was the greatest opportunity I had in 38 years. I go back to when I started at New Process Gear when I was 20, which was a great opportunity then. And, now PEACE, Inc. has been my second great opportunity.

PLEASE SHARE A MEMORABLE MOMENT IN YOUR WORK EXPERIENCE.

LYKE: I go back to the 2016 tax year. My first customer who came in - the very first one - said “You need to help me, I’m living in my car. Can you help me with my taxes?” It can be emotional at times, you know, when a person is living on the edge. The person brought their tax documents in and we helped. It’s just that he was so frantic and it was the first one I worked with that year - right out of the gate. Mostly, they’re all rewarding experiences. Sometimes, they’re tough, but I understand that some of our customers are living day-to-day. You have to take that all into consideration. We do our best to assist them. It’s rewarding - very rewarding.

DO YOU HAVE A HOBBY?

LYKE: Yes. record collecting. Mostly 50s, 60s Blues I collect. I’ll go to record shows once in a while. I just collect 45s, I have 4,000. I used to be a deejay in a local night club - it’s still under the same name, “Tip a Few” on James Street, back in 1982 to 1985. I didn’t have a microphone, I just sat back, and spinned records. We did that seven nights a week. I haven’t used them, my records, since 1986 as they sit in my basement. I’ll go to record shows and see something I don’t have and get it. Now you can go on Youtube, at home, and search for any song and it comes up. My records are stored in 30-inch wooden boxes, with a-to-z tabs, in thick green sleeves so you can leaf through them. Sometimes, I go home and at my leisure listen to music. It helps me to relax. Once tax season starts it doesn’t stop; it goes seven days straight and it takes an average of 45 minutes to prepare each tax return. We attempt to do 2,000 tax returns each year. I oversee the program, with 15 to 20 volunteer tax preparers. Most of the volunteers are one day a week and about a handful come in twice a week. So, I go home and listen to music on YouTube. It’s how I unwind.

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WHO IS THE PULSE OF PEACE, INC.?

LYKE: Mr. O’Hara without a doubt. He’s just a great spokesperson for the whole agency. He’s very busy, but he’s always very friendly, and he’s always a positive person, who stands for “hope.” In particular, he sees hope in people; the potential in a person.

HAVE YOU CHANGED AS AN INDIVIDUAL AS A RESULT OF WORKING AT PEACE, INC.?

LYKE: I had to develop “thick skin” for this cause. It’s something that you learn more each day. I had to understand our customer’s position; to understand what they may be going through. It’s never about me, it’s always about them.

WHAT IS ONE THING YOU THINK IS IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE TO KNOW?

LYKE: We apply our due diligence for the most correct and complete tax return we can do for our customers, in the shortest amount of time.

PRETEND TODAY IS YOUR FIRST DAY AT PEACE, INC. – AND YOU GET TO KEEP ALL OF THE INSIGHT YOU HAVE FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE AT PEACE, INC. TO DATE – WHAT WOULD YOUR FIRST DAY BE LIKE?

LYKE: My experience taught me you never know it all. My first day, it would be a long day, because there is a lot to learn. When I won the position, I had a lot to learn - there was a lot I didn’t know even though I had been volunteering. Also, when I started, I didn’t know how I was going to earn loyalty from our EITC team; and hold the team together. I’m the type of person who can be assertive if I need to. However, what I don’t do is try to embarrass tax preparers in front of our customers; we may talk about it later, but I never try to point out an error a volunteer made during our quality review process.

WHAT CAN THOSE YOU SERVE DO TO HELP YOU HELP THEM?

LYKE: Our customers need to have their bank information ready to go, and not have to be on the phone to retrieve it. Sometimes, that takes more time than preparing the tax return because the cell phone reception is poor at our site. This happens quite often and tends to be the biggest barrier in completing a tax return in a reasonable amount of time.