



Heart of Florida United Way

NEWS

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UNITED WAY IS ENCOURAGING RESIDENTS TO “HOLD ON” UNTIL FEB. 1 TO FILE TAXES AT ONE OF 30 FREE TAX PREP SITES

ORLANDO, FL (January 28, 2010) – At a time when thousands of Central Floridians are struggling to pay for rent, food utilities and other critical necessities, Heart of Florida United Way (HFUW) is helping qualified residents claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which is credited with lifting more children out of poverty than any other federal program. It also pumped \$395 million into tri-county area businesses last year.

Tax credits range from \$457 to \$5,657 for tax year 2009. EITC helps qualified families and individuals reduce debt, enroll in job training, save for a home, pay for car repairs or use in any way they see fit. To ensure that residents receive the full amount they are entitled to, more than 30 FREE tax preparation sites will be available from Feb. 1 to early April through a partnership with the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and AARP Tax-Aide programs. (For individual site dates and times please visit www.hfuw.org.)

“Because people in need often file early and at great expense through commercial tax preparation services, United Way wants to spread the word that free help is available,” said Larry Olness, United Way Community Services Vice President. “By filing returns at local VITA sites, people receive 100 percent of their refunds, usually within 10 days or less.”

To qualify for EITC, recipients must have worked at least one day in 2009 and meet income guidelines. In some cases, people may be able to claim up to \$19,000 by re-filing tax returns for the past three years.

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Among other qualifying factors, 2009 income cannot exceed:

- \$13,440 with no qualifying children (\$18,440 if married and filing jointly)
- \$35,463 with one qualifying child (\$40,463 if married and filing jointly)
- \$40,295 with two qualifying children (\$45,295 if married and filing jointly)
- \$43,279 with three or more qualifying children (\$48,279 if married and filing jointly)

EITC also provides a significant boost to the local economy. More than \$1 billion has been claimed regionally over the past three years, yet the Internal Revenue Service estimates that 25 percent of qualified residents failed to claim the tax credit due to lack of awareness. With an estimated one-in-four Central Floridians eligible for the credit, the economic impact on individual lives and on the community is tremendous.

“Because of rising unemployment and reduced wages, even more residents are likely to qualify for EITC this year,” said United Way President/CEO Robert H. (Bob) Brown. “An extra \$5,657 can make a huge difference to family that’s dealing with job loss, foreclosure or other financial crises. And because most EITC dollars are spent right here in our local community, local merchants and businesses also benefit.”

Reflecting great and growing need, calls to United Way 2-1-1, a free, 24-hour crisis hotline and information and referral helpline, continued to break new records. More than 119,500 calls were received in 2009 – the largest yearly call volume in 2-1-1’s history. With 47-percent more calls over the past two years, utility, rent and food assistance continue to rank as the top-three reasons people need help.

“People are hurting and they don’t know where to turn,” Olness said. “They’ve exhausted savings, benefits and family generosity, and many are facing the frightening prospect of hunger and homelessness.”

Recognizing the tremendous impact EITC dollars have on communities, the JPMorgan Chase Foundation, The Wachovia Wells Fargo Foundation and The Wal-Mart Foundation are providing additional support by sponsoring United Way’s Prosperity Campaign, which promotes EITC and other resources that help families improve their financial stability.

For more information about EITC, visit www.hfuw.org, dial 2-1-1 or visit www.irs.gov.

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About Heart of Florida United Way

Heart of Florida United Way is Central Florida’s most comprehensive health and human services charity and the largest provider of funds to the region’s most critical health and human service programs. The organization partners with local businesses, government, other charities and individuals to increase awareness of local health and human service issues and to inspire hope, provide options, and create possibilities for the people in our community. HFUW also operates United Way 2-1-1, Central Florida’s community information and referral helpline; a Volunteer Resource Center; a Gifts In Kind Center; a Stewardship program that works with agencies to provide emergency assistance; and the Ryan White Part B program, which administers nearly \$2 million to much needed HIV/AIDS services and referrals. The organization impacts more people annually than any other charity operating in the tri-county area. For more information, visit www.hfuw.org.

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