



Board of Directors Meeting



February 10, 2011

Media Items

Item V.H.

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St. Petersburg Times tampabay.com

January 11, 2011

Free preparers may take some of the sting out of paying taxes

By Waveney Ann Moore, Times Staff Writer

VITA works to ensure that low- and moderate-income filers get the full refunds they are due.

For Octavia Teharte, a single mother of four, tax season meant a brief financial respite, accelerated by quick cash in the form of what in tax circles is called a refund anticipation loan.

"Like everybody else, bills were coming and coming fast and I needed money fast," the St. Petersburg woman said.

Once, the fees handed over for the much-needed funds could have paid her electric bill.

Consumer advocates have long lobbied against the pricey, short-term loans that are based on a taxpayer's anticipated refund and often targeted at low-income workers. Beginning this year, the Internal Revenue Service [<http://www.irs.gov>] will no longer provide information about taxpayer government debt - unpaid child support and federally funded student loans, for example - used by tax preparers and financial institutions to determine the loans. That change will make it harder on those tax loan businesses and likely send more people to free preparation services.

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"The IRS told us to be prepared to be inundated for the first six weeks," said Cherin Stover, director of the Wealth Building Coalition of Pinellas County [<http://wbcpc.org>], which offers free income tax preparation to low- and moderate-income residents.

The organization, which works in partnership with the IRS, will begin this year's free tax program Tuesday at a dozen Volunteer Income Tax Assistance [<http://www.vita-volunteers.org/index.htm>] sites stretching from St. Petersburg to Tarpon Springs.

Monday, the coalition, which also offers financial education workshops and helps taxpayers open bank accounts, kicked off the tax season with a program attended by bankers, chambers of commerce, government officials and nonprofit organizations. U.S. Rep. Kathy Castor, St. Petersburg Mayor Bill Foster, Tarpon Springs Mayor David Archie and two IRS representatives were among the speakers in Largo.

Besides spreading word of its free services, the Wealth Building Coalition is trying to educate residents about the often unclaimed federal earned income tax credit that could result in hundreds and even thousands of dollars in refunds for taxpayers.

"It has a multimillion-dollar impact on just St. Pete," Foster said of the underutilized tax credit.

Juvenile Welfare Board [<http://www.jwbpinellas.org>] executive director Gay Lancaster said the money families save by

going to a VITA site and the refunds they receive through the earned income tax credit help parents provide stable homes in a county where 28,000 children live in poverty.

The earned income tax credit, a benefit for low- and moderate-income workers, offsets the payroll and income taxes they pay. Under the economic stimulus package, qualified taxpayers will benefit from a temporary increase in the credit again this year.

Janis Ford, community enrichment [http://www.stpete.org/community_enrichment/index.asp] and Weed & Seed [http://www.stpete.org/midtown/weed_and_seed.asp] coordinator for the city of St. Petersburg, noted that the Wealth Building Coalition was launched eight years ago, after it was learned that more than \$20 million in earned income tax credit was going unclaimed in Pinellas County.

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For the Tampa Bay Beaches Chamber of Commerce [<http://www.tampabaybeaches.com/cwt/external/wcpages/index.aspx>], telling eligible workers about the free tax service and earned income tax credit is not enough. President and chief executive officer Robin Grabowski said the chamber has asked large resorts to offer the tax program on their properties as a convenience to hospitality workers. Beginning this tax season, the Don CeSar Beach Resort and Spa [<http://www.loewshotels.com/en/don-cesar-beach-resort/>], TradeWinds Island Resort [<http://www.tradewindsresort.com>] and Sirata Beach Resort [<http://www.sirata.com>] will do so, Grabowski said.

Kathleen Peters, vice president of public affairs for the Clearwater Regional Chamber of Commerce [<http://www.clearwaterflorida.org>] and South Pasadena mayor, said the chamber also is working with businesses to inform employees about the tax credit and free tax preparation.

"When you hear it from your employer, you know it's real," said Laura Berkowitz, communications manager for the Pinellas County Human Resources Department [<http://https://employment.pinellascounty.org>].

Last week, both the National Consumer Law Center [<http://www.nclc.org>] and the Consumer Federation of America [<http://www.consumerfed.org>], which estimated that about 7.2 million taxpayers received refund anticipation loans in the 2009 tax filing season, encouraged low-income taxpayers to take advantage of free services such as those offered at VITA and AARP Tax-Aide [<http://www.aarp.org/applications/vmislocator/searchtaxaidelocations.action?intcmp=dso-hp-sl-5>] sites.

Teharte, 40, the St. Petersburg mother, stopped borrowing money to expedite her refund after discovering the VITA sites. Now she urges family and friends to do the same. "It's really hard to change behaviors," she said. "It's hard to live for tomorrow when you can barely live for today."

Waveney Ann Moore can be reached at wmoore@sptimes.com or (727) 892-2283.

>> fast facts

For help

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance [<http://www.vita-volunteers.org/index.htm>], through the Wealth Building Coalition of Pinellas County: Free tax service to taxpayers with household incomes under \$49,000. Sites open Tuesday. For locations, call 211 or the James B. Sanderlin Neighborhood Family Center at (727) 321-9444.

AARP Tax-Aide program [<http://www.aarp.org/applications/vmislocator/searchtaxaidelocations.action?intcmp=dso-hp-sl-5>]: Free tax service for low- to moderate-income taxpayers. Special attention is given to those over 60, but clients do not have to be AARP members or even retired. Free one-on-one counseling and assistance on the telephone and Internet are available. Sites open Feb. 1 to April 15. Go to [aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org) [<http://www.aarp.org>] and click on the Tax-Aide program link or call toll-free, 1-888-227-7669, late January through April 15.



Pinellas County, FL - January 19, 2011 -

The Clearwater Regional Chamber of Commerce recognized businesses, not-for- profits and philanthropic leaders at their sold out 89th Annual Meeting held at the Sheraton Sand Key Resort last evening.

2-1-1 Tampa Bay Cares was awarded ***Not-for-Profit of the Year for 2011*** in the medium category by the Clearwater Regional Chamber of Commerce!

2-1-1 Tampa Bay Cares' mission is "Connecting People and Resources" . Every hour of every day, hundreds of people are in need of essential human services - they are looking for employment, food for their family, help for an aging parent, addiction prevention programs for their teenage children, a place to stay for the night, affordable child care options, support groups and ways of becoming part of their community.

2-1-1 provides that critical connection to those support programs that facilitate access to intervention, information, and services. We accomplish this through using enhanced means of technologies as the primary vehicle for delivering that access, and optimize the effectiveness of our community's resources by sustaining a web of connections to meet needs and contribute to positive social change.

Faced with a dramatic increase in the number of needs in our community, people often don't know where to turn. In many cases, people find it frustrating and confusing to access community information and end up going without these necessary services because they don't know where to start.

The ultimate goal of 2-1-1 is to provide vital information that benefits individuals and communities to better people's lives.

2-1-1 Tampa Bay Cares would like to thank the business community for their support and nomination of our agency.

It is with our deepest expression of gratitude to The Clearwater Regional Chamber of Commerce that we accept this great and unexpected honor.



St. Petersburg Times tampabay.com

January 21, 2011

Tally will count homeless in Hillsborough, Pinellas next week

By Danny Valentine and Ileana Morales, Times Staff Writers

Officials in Pinellas and Hillsborough counties expect to see more homeless people during next week's census because of high unemployment and families doubling up in homes.

This is the first year the count will recognize an updated federal definition of homeless people to include families living in another family's home. Pinellas County's count is set for Monday, and Hillsborough County's is Thursday.

The census is important to those who help the homeless because it helps determine federal, state and local funding.

"With the economic times, we anticipate an increase, but obviously it's very difficult to count every homeless person in a one-day period," said Lesa Weikel, a spokeswoman for the Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County.

Pinellas County also expects to see an increase, especially among families and the newly homeless, said Sarah Snyder, executive director of the Pinellas County Coalition for the Homeless.

"We're seeing folks who were hanging on by their fingernails the first couple of years now just at the bottom," Snyder said.

Officials say this year's count will offer the most complete picture of homelessness in Tampa Bay. But it's still going to miss some people.

Several variables affect the count. It could rain, or it could be freezing. Some may refuse to participate in the survey.

Pinellas plans to count people who are doubled up by contacting them through schools and state and federal agencies that provide aid for people on the verge of homelessness. Hillsborough will depend on doubled-up families to call and report themselves (Pinellas families also can call in), or it may find those who seek aid at a service provider.

The methodology has improved over the years to reduce the chance of counting the same person more than once.

Organizers don't have the 570 volunteers needed to cover the 1,100 square miles of Hillsborough County, Weikel said. A week before the count, the coalition had 300 volunteers. In 2009, about 275 volunteers counted 9,566 homeless people.

Pinellas County has roughly 215 volunteers this year, 40 more than last year, Snyder said.

Authorities in Hillsborough County have said for months that more panhandlers are working the streets since St. Petersburg banned street solicitations on June 3, and the Tampa City Council this week took the first step toward banning panhandlers from major roadways.

But Weikel said a worsening economy is more to blame than St. Petersburg's ban, citing a survey in August of 14 panhandlers that found fewer than 20 percent had panhandled recently in St. Petersburg.

Snyder said next week's homeless count will help clarify the situation. Hillsborough County's survey will try to determine whether panhandling is a source of income for the homeless.

Totals from the count won't be available for a few months.

.Fast facts

Hillsborough County

Families now doubling up with another family may call 1-800-528-0808 toll-free on Thursday to be counted.

To volunteer: (813) 223-6115. For more information, visit homelessofhc.org.

Homeless in Hillsborough: 2009: 9,566; 2007: 9,532; 2005: 11,023; 2003: 8,782; 2002: 6,481.

In 2005, Hillsborough County switched to a biennial count. Pinellas County still does an annual count, but is also considering a switch to free up resources. Their numbers include homeless people reported in shelters, on streets, runaways and other circumstances. Totals also include some estimates for those homeless before entering prison.

.Fast facts

Pinellas County

Families now doubling up with another family may call 1-800-528-0808 toll-free on Thursday to be counted.

To volunteer: (727) 424-1355. For more information, visit pinellashomeless.org.

Homeless in Pinellas:

2010: 5,949; 2009: 6,235; 2008: 5,553; 2007: 4,940; 2006: 4,710; 2005: 4,540; 2004: 4,081.

In 2005, Hillsborough County switched to a biennial count. Pinellas County still does an annual count, but is also considering a switch to free up resources. Their numbers include homeless people reported in shelters, on streets, runaways and other circumstances. Totals also include some estimates for those homeless before entering prison.

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St. Petersburg Times tampabay.com

February 2, 2011

Health related events, classes, activities in area

By Times Wire

Health notes

event to put early focus on domestic violence, trauma

The Tarpon Springs Rotary Club, in conjunction with the Shepherd Center of Tarpon Springs, will host a Community Education Day from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Saturday at First United Methodist Church, 501 E Tarpon Ave., Tarpon Springs, to address the problem of domestic violence and trauma, and the behavioral signs of victims. The program's goal is to help the community understand that there are resources available to treat the problem at an early age.

A common denominator of both incarceration and homelessness is domestic violence and the trauma associated with such abuse. It is a cycle that need not be perpetuated and one that can be healed and transformed.

Speakers will include Tonier Cain, a trauma victim and current director of Advocacy Services for the National Association of State Mental Health Directors; Dr. Joan Gillece, project director for the National Center for Trauma Informed Care; Dr. Andy Blanch, president of the Center for Religious Tolerance and member of the National Trauma Consortium; and Kim Townsel, director and principal consultant of The Townsel Group.

Representatives from the following organizations will be present to speak with attendees: The Haven; Juvenile Welfare Board; Early Childhood Services (Suncoast Center); Batterer's Intervention Program; and Veterans Advocacy Services.

Lunch and refreshments will be provided.

There is no charge to attend, but registration is required. Call Ron Haddad at (727) 804-8332 or e-mail rjhaddad@gte.net). To register online, visit domesticviolenceconference.eventbrite.com.

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What are holistic products, services?

Listen, touch, feel and experience state-of-the-art holistic products and services from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at Cypress Palms, 400 Lake Ave. NE, Largo.

Those who attend will learn about acupuncture, aromatherapy, ayurvedic medicine, oriental and herbal medicine, lymph therapy, reflexology, reiki, supplements, tai chi and yoga. Also featured: "Culinary Delights" presentations, demonstrations and recipes.

Call Sadie at (727) 253-7847.