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Local Volunteers Aid Low-Income Working People to Claim Tax Credits

Earned Income Tax Credit Puts Money In Local Pockets, Boosts Local Economy

(PITTSBURGH) -- Last year, approximately one in four eligible taxpayers in Allegheny County did not claim the federal Earned Income Tax Credit resulting in an estimated \$38 million going unclaimed. In addition, the IRS estimates that \$7 million was spent by local low-wage workers on tax preparation fees and the fees associated with refund anticipation loans. The United Way of Allegheny County and the Money In Your Pocket Coalition are partnering to provide free tax preparation services to low-income households to put more of this money in local pockets.

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is, according to many, the nation's largest and most effective anti-poverty effort. For a full-time minimum wage worker, the EITC could represent as much as three months of take home pay, a welcome relief in a difficult economy. In fact, the maximum EITC for tax year 2008 is \$4,824.

Unlike some other tax credits, the EITC is fully refundable, which means that even if a household does not owe taxes, it can file for the EITC and receive the full credit as a refund. In addition, it is available for some qualifying individuals as well as for families. This Friday, January 30, 2009, is National EITC Awareness Day and United Way of Allegheny County along with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services are doing their part to make the citizens of Allegheny County aware of the potential tax break.

"This year we have recruited and trained an unprecedented number of volunteers to provide free tax preparation services for low-income, working people in our community. These 60 individuals work in local corporations, study in local universities and serve the community as staff in area non-profits. They understand the importance of providing free tax preparation services to individual households and they appreciate the impact that the refund dollars can have on our local economy," says United Way President Robert Nelkin. Marc Cherna, Director, Allegheny County Department of Human Services states, "In these times of great need, the EITC refund can mean the difference between heating the house or going cold or having enough food to feed the kids. It is important to get the word out to working families that the EITC is available and how to get help for free."

To qualify for free tax preparation services through these VITA sites a family's income can be up to \$40,000. Individuals with income up to \$20,000 are also eligible. Interested taxpayers should call the United Way HelpLine (a 24 hour information and referral service) at 412.255.1155 to find out how to schedule an appointment.

IRS certified volunteers are now available to assist taxpayers with federal, state and local tax returns and are offering referrals to other community services which may assist people in achieving or maintaining financial stability.

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EITC/add1

Taxpayers who have had changes in financial, marital and parental status should consult the EITC Assistant on www.IRS.gov or call 800-829-1040 for help determining their eligibility.

The Money In Your Pocket Coalition is comprised of - **Just Harvest**, South Side; **City/County Building VITA site**, Downtown Pittsburgh; **Parental Stress Center**, East Liberty; **Goodwill of Southwestern PA**, McKeesport; **UCP of Pittsburgh**, Oakland and **The United Way of Allegheny County** in partnership with the local **IRS Stakeholder Partnership Education and Communication (SPEC)** offices and the Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

United Way of Allegheny County is a change agent and efficient community fundraiser that improves lives by addressing critical community needs. By convening diverse partners and investing in programs and people to advance solutions, United Way creates long-lasting change and helps children and youth succeed, strengthens and supports families by promoting financial stability, ensures the safety and well-being of vulnerable seniors, and provides county-wide access to information and referral sources meeting basic needs. www.unitedwaypittsburgh.org

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