

Press Release

Contact: Maria Stokes, tel: 415-808-4264

Demand for Free Tax Help Surges in Bay Area

Tough times drive 25% increase in clients seeking assistance

SAN FRANCISCO, March 15, 2011 – With approximately one month left in this year's tax filing season, Earn It! Keep It! Save It! has already experienced a 25% increase in demand for free tax preparation services that it provides to low- and moderate-income Bay Area households - those which earned less than \$49,000 in 2010. The Bay Area's largest free tax assistance program, which served more than 51,000 clients last year, kicked off in late January and continues through tax day, April 18.

"We opened in early February, and we have already served as many clients as we did during the entire tax season last year," said Luis Granados, executive director of Mission Economic Development Agency, which operates one of the 200 Earn It! Keep It! Save It! free tax sites in the region. "We are seeing a lot of first-time customers – people who now qualify for free tax help and other important credits because their income dropped significantly last year due to job loss or a cut in work hours."

Kelly Batson, regional director of Earn It! Keep It! Save It! said, "While many of our free tax sites are extremely busy, we have lots of sites that are ready and eager to serve clients during these next few weeks. We're encouraging taxpayers not to procrastinate -- call 211 now to find the free tax site near you and take advantage of this valuable service."

She added, "Even if you didn't qualify for free tax preparation in previous years, this year could be different, especially if you saw a reduction in your income. Not only will you get your taxes prepared for free, but you'll also receive expert guidance on how to account for unemployment benefits in your tax return and which tax breaks you are eligible for when your income is down."

Celebrating its ninth year in 2011, Earn It! Keep It! Save It! provides free tax assistance to households that earned less than \$49,000 in 2010. Since the recession began, the program has proved to be a money-saving resource for the unemployed: last year, 33% of Earn It! Keep It! Save It! clients reported that they or someone in their household had lost their job in the previous year. More than one in four (29%) experienced a cut in hours and/or wages. Six out of 10 clients used refunds to pay bills.

In addition to helping almost 52,000 individual taxpayers last year, Earn It! Keep It! Save It! has also emerged as an important local economic engine. In 2010, refunds claimed by Earn It! Keep It! Save It! clients is projected to generate 276 Bay Area jobs and \$73 million in local sales and wages, according to a recent analysis of the program by Fresno State University professor Anthony Avalos.

Earn It! Keep It! Save It! continues to build awareness about the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), the nation’s largest benefits program for working families. The EITC, which can boost the annual income of a low-wage worker by as much as 10%, was created in 1975 to offset the burden of Social Security taxes on low-wage workers and provide an incentive to work. This credit is often overlooked by commercial tax preparers, but Earn It! Keep It! Save It! volunteers are trained to identify eligible taxpayers. Over the last several years, the EITC benefit has grown significantly, from just over \$4,000 to \$5,666, the maximum possible credit for Tax Year 2010.

Last year, Earn It! Keep It! Save It! processed \$57 million in refunds for 51,963 Bay Area households. It also helped low-wage families claim more than \$18 million in EITC.

WHAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free tax return preparation and e-filing • Assistance filing tax-credit claims, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), childcare credits and San Francisco’s Working Families Credit • Asset-building resources
WHO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Bay Area households that earned less than \$49,000 in 2010 are eligible for free tax preparation service and e-filing. EITC eligibility depends on family income and size.
WHERE & WHEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earn It! Keep It! Save It! operates sites in Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano and Sonoma Counties. For times and locations, call 211 or 800-358-8832 or visit www.EarnItKeepItSaveIt.org.
WHAT TO BRING:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Security cards or ITIN for all family members • W-2 forms for all jobs • 1099 forms and other income forms • Voided check for direct deposit • Childcare provider information: name, address, tax id number • Previous year’s tax return if available • Name, address and phone number of landlord (if you have one).

***Note to Editors:** Media are encouraged to visit tax preparation sites to talk with volunteers and taxpayers. To arrange a visit, please contact Maria Stokes, 415-808-4264, mstokes@uwba.org.

About Earn It! Keep It! Save It! Bay Area

Led by United Way of the Bay Area, Earn It! Keep It! Save It! Bay Area coordinates more than 200 free tax preparation sites and asset development programs in Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Solano Counties, with the participation of more than 250 public and private-sector partners. Funding partners include Bank of America, Citi, City of Oakland – Community Action Partnership, Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, Internal Revenue Service, Wal-Mart Foundation, Levi Strauss Foundation, National Disability Institute, Union Bank of California, United WayWorldwide, United Way of the Bay Area, Wells Fargo, and others. For more information please visit www.EarnItKeepItSaveIt.org or call 510-238-2418.

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