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**United Way of
Southwestern Pennsylvania**

United Way, Allegheny County and partners celebrate VITA Awareness Day

Free tax preparation helps low-wage workers build financial stability, boosts local economy

Pittsburgh, Pa. (March 11, 2016) – United Way of Southwestern PA, in partnership with the Money in Your Pocket Coalition (MIYPC), has joined with Allegheny County and other partner agencies to provide local eligible workers with free tax preparation services at IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites. In order to raise more awareness in the community about the free tax prep sites, United Way, along with the County, will observe VITA Awareness Day on Tuesday, March 15.

“Each year, VITA programs help local working families, who might be struggling to make ends meet, access tax credits through free tax preparation,” said Angela Reynolds, United Way’s Director of PA 2-1-1 Southwest and Helping Families Thrive. “This is money that can help people meet basic needs, from an unexpected bill, to maintaining reliable transportation, to putting food on the table. We hope to raise more awareness about the IRS-certified volunteers engaged with free tax sites in our community, so we can help even more individuals and families in need.”

United Way’s Free Tax Prep Campaign has already filed more than 3,000 tax returns in Allegheny County this year, thanks to the help of over 225 IRS-certified VITA tax preparers. Last year, across the region, United Way tax preparers helped file more than 10,000 tax returns, resulting in millions of dollars in tax refunds for households in the region.

Allegheny County, which hosts a free tax site at its Department of Human Services, has filed more than 165 tax returns and has developed programming and outreach to serve immigrants and refugees, as well as restaurant and lodging employees.

“We are pleased to be part of such a huge push to help our local workers get more of their money back during the tax season,” said County Executive Rich Fitzgerald. “Each year we hope to raise even more awareness of the sites and continue launching new, innovative programming to reach even more tax-payers in need.”

VITA programs offer low-wage workers a free alternative to more-costly tax preparation services. The sites are IRS-sponsored and closely monitored by the agency.

Appointments for free tax preparation can be made by dialing 2-1-1, texting your zip code to 898-211, or visiting www.pa211sw.org, the free, 24-hour human services information and referral line powered by United Way. 2-1-1 resource navigators schedule free tax preparation appointments for VITA sites in four counties (Allegheny, Greene, Washington and Westmoreland) and make service referrals for Fayette and Lawrence counties, which are also part of the MIYPC. 2-1-1 serves as a resource for free tax preparation assistance for 11 counties throughout Southwestern PA. Households with a total annual income up to \$54,000 *may* qualify for free in-person tax preparation; free online tax assistance is available for individuals and families with a total annual income up to \$62,000.

About United Way of Southwestern PA – United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania, serving Allegheny, Westmoreland, Fayette and Southern Armstrong counties, leads and mobilizes the caring power of individuals, the business community and organizations to help local people in need measurably improve their lives. United Way creates long-lasting change for the betterment of our community.

About Money in Your Pocket Coalition – The Money in Your Pocket Coalition (MIYPC) is a group of nonprofit and government agencies in southwestern PA who provide free tax preparation for low-and-moderate income individuals and families. Since 2009, the Coalition has trained and mobilized hundreds of community volunteers during tax season to provide free, quality income tax preparation assistance to families. Beyond the tax season, the Coalition partners offer year-round assistance for financially struggling adults and families.

The MIYPC is comprised of the following agencies, in partnership with the IRS, *PA 2-1-1 Southwest*, and United Way of Southwestern PA: Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Allegheny Valley Association of Churches, Community Action Southwest, Fayette County Community Action Agency, Goodwill of Southwestern PA/ Northside Common Ministries, Human Services Center Corporation, Just Harvest Education Fund, Lawrence County Community Action Partnership, North Hills Community Outreach, Robert Morris University, Veterans Leadership Program of Western PA, Westmoreland Community Action, YWCA Greater Pittsburgh/ YMCA Hope for All.

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