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UNITED WAY TO OFFER FREE TAX PREP SERVICES FOR LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS

Irvine, CA — As tax season kicks into high gear, low-income local residents looking to realize greater tax savings will have a helping hand, thanks to free tax preparation services offered by Orange County United Way.

A key element in United Way's FACE 2024 community-wide action plan to reduce the number of financially unstable families by 25 percent, the tax prep services provide a way for families to file their taxes and, in many cases, reduce their tax burden.

"Each tax season, Orange County residents collectively miss out on millions of dollars of unclaimed federal tax refunds," explained Orange County United Way President and CEO Max Gardner. "When you consider that one in five eligible families do not claim their Earned Income Tax Credit, this program has a direct impact on the pocketbooks of a significant percentage of our community's most at-risk population."

Last year alone, United Way's Free Tax Prep Campaign served over 15,000 low to moderate-income taxpayers and seniors (8,214 through AARP Foundation Tax-Aide) and as a result, returned more than \$13 million in refunds, and more than \$3.6 million in Earned Income Tax Credit dollars to Orange County taxpayers in their communities. These extra dollars help families pay for needs such as food, shelter, clothing and even education expenses, stabilizing low and moderate-income families and stimulating the local economy.

Households earning less than \$60,000 in 2014 may be eligible for free tax preparation services this year. Residents earning less than \$52,427 may also be eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and could receive up to a \$6,143 credit on their federal tax return.

Free tax preparation services are provided through the IRS-based Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and AARP Foundation Tax-Aide programs at over 50 partner sites across the county, including nonprofit centers, senior centers and schools.

“The response to our free tax prep services has been tremendous over the years thanks to our fantastic partners and sponsors,” said Carla Vargas, Orange County United Way’s Senior Vice President of Community Impact. “This program offers working families the ability to secure tax credits and deductions they previously would not otherwise receive.”

United Way will host its tax season kick-off on January 31st at Irvine Valley College, in partnership with the City of Irvine, Irvine Valley College and Board of Equalization Member Diane L. Harkey.

“I am happy to partner with United Way in helping residents prepare returns this filing season,” said Harkey, Orange County’s newly elected Member of the State Board of Equalization. “Taxpayers deserve to know their rights and options, and I encourage everyone to take full advantage of this and other free services to save time and money.”

To locate a free tax preparation site, call 888.434.8248. Individuals may also qualify to prepare taxes from home at www.MyFreeTaxes.com. To learn more about United Way’s Income goals and strategies to promote greater financial stability for Orange County families, visit <http://www.unitedwayoc.org/income>.

ABOUT ORANGE COUNTY UNITED WAY:

Since 1924, Orange County United Way has been working to improve lives and strengthen our community by mobilizing the caring power of Orange County, by focusing on the building blocks for a good quality of life: Education, Income, Health and Housing. By investing in Orange County’s children, families and individuals, we help them create pathways to self-sufficient futures through education and training. In short, we help people help themselves. Through our 10-year community-wide action plan “FACE 2024” (an acronym for Fund, Advocate, Collaborate, Educate), United Way is mobilizing local businesses, community organizations, governmental agencies and individuals to make a long-term measurable difference in the lives of local individuals and families. To learn more or to join our movement, visit www.unitedwayoc.org.

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