

## NEWS RELEASE

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Local Universities to Compete in United Way of Greater Stark County's "Pack the House" Tax Filing Event

(Canton, OH) January 23, 2018 – United Way of Greater Stark County's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program is hosting a Tax-A-Thon on Friday, February 2<sup>nd</sup> and Saturday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>. The event will feature a "Pack the House" competition between students at Mount Union, Walsh and Malone Universities. IRS-trained volunteer student tax preparers from these schools will participate in a friendly competition to see which who can file the most tax returns and log the most hours during the event. Alumni are encouraged to make their appointment soon, and specify which school they are supporting.

"VITA's Pack the House is a fun way for local students and alumni to support their alma mater. In addition to bragging rights amongst the rival schools, the winning team will receive a trophy and a plaque." says Chrisann Leaman, Manager of United Way of Greater Stark County's Financial Prosperity Center. "It's also great opportunity for college students to log volunteer hours and network with local professionals.

The Tax-A-Thon will feature 24 hours of free tax preparation split into 2 days of service for local taxpayers with annual incomes of \$65,000 or less. VITA volunteers will work with clients to identify tax credits that are often overlooked, while helping people avoid the high cost of paid preparers and predatory lenders. Those filing with direct deposit can typically expect a refund in 7-10 days. An IRS-compliant drop-off service is also available for taxpayers who are unable to schedule in-person assistance.

"The goal of the Tax-A-Thon and Pack the House events is to increase the number of local taxpayers who file for free," explains VITA Site Coordinator Tami Stephens. "We can help people increase the tax credits they claim, while saving them money spent on filing fees, typically about \$250."

According to census data, approximately 90,000 households in Stark County make less than \$60,000 a year. Of these households, only 2,100 (2%) of these households filed with VITA last year. Volunteer tax preparers donated 1,688 hours of their time and helped complete 4,166 Federal and State returns. The service was named "Ohio Benefit Bank Site of the Year" by the Ohio Association of Food Banks for the past 3 years. VITA was also voted one of the top three tax services in Stark County in The Canton Repository's Readers' Choice Awards for the past 2 years. Tax clinics are scheduled at multiple locations throughout tax season.

"The VITA program helps taxpayers in our community save a substantial amount of money," says UWGSC President and CEO Maria Heege. "Last tax season, UWGSC and its 93 VITA volunteers helped income tax clients in Stark and Carroll Counties collect over \$3 million in tax credits and refunds."

To schedule an appointment for the Tax-A-Thon/Pack the House event - or anytime during tax season - visit [www.uwstark.org/freetax](http://www.uwstark.org/freetax). The call center at 330-994-VITA (8482) will be available Monday-Thursday, 10AM -5PM beginning January 2, 2018. Anyone interested in volunteering should complete the online VITA volunteer registration form at or contact **Tami Stephens** at 330-491-9989 or [tami.stephens@uwstark.org](mailto:tami.stephens@uwstark.org).

## **About United Way**

United Way of Greater Stark County fights for the Health, Education and Financial Stability of every person in every community. The agency collaborates, convenes, and partners to support programs and initiatives that break the cycle of poverty, promote a healthy community where children are successful from kindergarten through graduation to a career, and where families have the tools, skills, and support they need to become financially independent. We win by living United. For more information about United Way of Greater Stark

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