

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

United Way of Greater Stark County Announces VITA Program Tax-A-Thon and Pack the House Events

(Canton, OH) December 27, 2017 –United Way of Greater Stark County’s Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program is hosting a Tax-A-Thon on Friday, February 2nd and Saturday, February 3rd at UWGSC’s Financial Prosperity Center at OhioMeansJobs at 822 30th Street NW in Canton. The event 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. IRS-trained 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.

“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.” explains VITA Site Coordinator Tami Stephens. “The goal of the Tax-A-Thon is to increase the number of local taxpayers who file for free. We’ll help them increase the tax credits they claim, and save them about \$250 in filing fees.”

The event will also include a Pack the House competition between local universities. Volunteer student tax preparers from Mount Union, Walsh and Malone Universities will participate in a friendly contest to see which school’s volunteers 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. In addition to bragging rights amongst rivals, the winning team will receive a trophy and a plaque.

“VITA’s Pack the House is a win-win,” explains Chrisann Leaman, Manager of United Way of Greater Stark County’s Financial Prosperity Center. “It’s a fantastic opportunity for local college students in need of volunteer hours or professional networking, while providing a fun way for local students and alumni to support their alma mater.”

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. 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 brings a substantial amount of money back into the community each year,” says UWGSC President and CEO Maria Heege. “Last year’s average VITA tax refund was \$1,545. This money stimulates the local economy, and VITA helps people avoid the high cost of paid preparers and predatory lenders.”

To schedule an appointment for the Tax-A-Thon/Pack the House event - or anytime during tax season – visit www.uwstark.org/freetax. The call center at 330-994-VITA (8482) is available Monday-Thursday, 10AM -5PM. 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.

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 County visit www.uwstark.org. Headquarters are at 401 Market Avenue North, Suite 300, Canton, Ohio 44702. (330) 491-0445.

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