



RealSense
A United Way Initiative
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REALSENSE HELPS FIRST COAST EMPLOYEES GET FINANCIALLY FIT!

There is no doubt that the ailing economy has created its fair share of problems for employers and employees alike. As many employers implement cost-saving strategies to keep their businesses afloat, such as layoffs, salary decreases and furloughs, employees are struggling with how to balance rising consumer costs with less take home pay. Through a wide array of on-site, employer-based financial education classes, United Way's RealSense Prosperity Campaign is providing First Coast employers **free** financial resources that many employees need to establish or maintain financial stability.

The Money Smart Series, supported by United Way's RealSense Prosperity Campaign, consists of up to ten 60-minute sessions covering topics such as budgeting, setting goals and saving, borrowing, credit cards, debt management, and consumer protection. The classes are now available to be taught in the workplace as a free, employer-based financial education benefit for employees, and the curriculum can be customized to ensure meeting the greatest needs of employees. Among those currently availing themselves of this benefit are the City of Jacksonville and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida.

"If I hadn't taken the class about credit, I'd have never known there was a problem with my credit report," said Michelle Smith, a Blue Cross and Blue Shield employee. "Until the RealSense classes, I never thought credit was a big deal." After checking her credit report, Michelle soon discovered that another Michelle Smith in Maryland had several delinquencies to creditors that had found their way to her credit report. Thanks to class instructions, Michelle knew how to dispute the report and did so. Today, Michelle has the excellent credit she deserves. "I'm so grateful for these financial education classes," said Smith. In fact, she's keeping all the class materials to pass on to her daughter.

During 2009 so far, approximately 300 Blue Cross and Blue Shield employees have participated in a number of classes offered by RealSense. These classes were scheduled based on survey feedback that indicated the company's WIN (Women's Interactive Network) members were interested in learning more about personal financial management.

"The one hour workshops generally take place over the noon hour," said Learning and Development Consultant Lynn Capaldo of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida. "Word is out that they are worthwhile and the workshops are full."

According to RealSense Director Jeff Winkler, a key priority this year for RealSense is that more corporate partners offer these free classes on-site as an enhancement to their company's benefits package and wellness program. "In light of the tough economy," said Winkler, "research shows these classes can increase productivity and help reduce turnover while providing valuable money management skills to employees."

Anita McKinney of the Duval County Extension Office has taught many of the employer-based free financial education classes during the past year on behalf of United Way's RealSense Prosperity Campaign. "Helping corporate and city employees get more 'fiscally fit' is a gratifying process, especially in these challenging times," said McKinney, a faculty member of the University of Florida with Bachelors and Masters Degrees in Family and Consumer Sciences and Financial Management from Purdue University.

For one City of Jacksonville employee who had just filed bankruptcy, the free budgeting class seemed to be too late. Now, though, *Jane* (not her real name) says that the class gave her an anchor to cling to in tough times and clear guidance toward new financial wellness. "More people should attend the "wants vs. needs" class offered through RealSense," said *Jane*. "It helped me through the bankruptcy process and now I'm better equipped to plan ahead," *Jane* says. She firmly believes had she known earlier about the community resources available to her through RealSense, she might have avoided filing for bankruptcy.

"We plan to host an informational breakfast at the Federal Reserve on October 30th to introduce the Free Financial Education Classes to employers across the First Coast," said Winkler. "In the meantime, RealSense has joined forces with the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) to educate employers of this timely educational benefit they can offer for their employees. It is just one of the many ways that the RealSense Prosperity Campaign is working to positively impact our local economy."

For more information on establishing on-site financial education classes, please contact Anita McKinney at 904-387-8850 or mckinney@coj.net.

To register for the October 30th Informational Breakfast for Employers, please contact Barb Klingler at 904-632-1025 or Barb.L.Klingler@atl.frb.org. Limited space available.