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***RealSense Prosperity Campaign's fifth annual tax season kickoff,
Earned Income Tax Credit Awareness Day is 'best' to date***

Jacksonville, FL - The **RealSense Prosperity Campaign**, a locally based coalition of agencies, nonprofits and businesses working in partnership to improve the financial outlook for Northeast Florida citizens, announces that its **Fifth Annual Tax Season Kickoff and Earned Income Tax Credit Awareness Day** held in January was deemed the "best" by its 250 attendees.

More than 50 organizations from all sectors of the community form the RealSense team that provides information about the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), free income tax preparation for those who qualify, money-management and credit restoration education, and information about matched savings accounts (Individual Development Account or IDA) that encourage setting and attaining long-term goals.

Attendees, including Roslyn Phillips, representing **Mayor John Peyton**, volunteers and board members, celebrated the opening of tax season with fellowship, a complimentary Southern-style breakfast and a performance by the Potters House national award-winning cheerleaders.

Michelle Braun, Southeast Community Relations Executive for Wachovia Bank and Community Chair for the RealSense Prosperity Campaign, opened the program with welcoming remarks and thanks to the many individuals and organizations within the community who contribute their time, money and resources to the worthwhile program. Following were special presentations by Heather Duncan with AT&T and Carol Barnett with the IRS, both RealSense Prosperity Campaign partners. Next, Heidi Vandenberg, who is hearing impaired, offered a testimonial about the benefits of the RealSense Prosperity Campaign and the difference participation has made in her life.

Keynote speaker **R. Jai Howard, Director for the Florida Financial Literacy Council**, took the podium next to speak about the importance of the campaign on a grassroots level and the outstanding efforts of its leaders and volunteers. **Connie Hodges, United Way of Northeast Florida President**, followed with greetings and special announcements including introduction of the program's special **celebrity guest, Oletha Mathis**, mother of Jaguars' cornerback **Rashean Mathis** (No. 27) who is also the RealSense Prosperity Campaign celebrity sponsor.

“Raising four children mostly on my own makes me wish that the RealSense Prosperity Campaign had been there for me when my children were small,” she said. “Like Rashean, I believe in this campaign and its benefits for people in the community.”

Asked her secret to positive parenting, Mathis responded, “My kids had to bring their books home from school every day, whether they had homework or not. And, all the kids congregated at our house because I liked knowing where my children were. Now, all my children are grown and they not only completed high school, they all finished college.”

For more information about free tax preparation or any of the other RealSense Prosperity Campaign programs and services, call United Way at 2-1-1 by dialing 2-1-1 or 1-904-632-0600 or visit the website at www.realsensejax.org. Tax preparation is free for families and individuals with a total income of \$40,000 or less and for people who are 60 and older at 43 locations in Jacksonville and surrounding counties—Clay, Putnam, Nassau and St. Johns.

The RealSense Prosperity campaign is a community-wide initiative led by United Way of Northeast Florida and funded by Bank of America, the City of Jacksonville, Family Foundations, the Jessie Ball duPont Fund, the National Disabilities Institute, Northeast Florida Community Action Agency, SunTrust Bank, United Way of Northeast Florida, United Way of St. Johns County, Wachovia Bank and Winn-Dixie.

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