

# REAL News



**RealSense**  
A United Way Initiative



FEBRUARY, 2010 • VOL 3, NO 1

## RealSense Kickoff GOOD NEWS IN TOUGH TIMES!

On Friday, January 29th the RealSense Prosperity Campaign hosted a positive high-energy Tax Season Kickoff Celebration at the Bank of America Campus. Connie Hodges, President of United Way of Northeast Florida and the Honorable John Peyton, Mayor of Jacksonville welcomed more than 200 business leaders and volunteers to the 7th Annual Kickoff Event.



LEFT TO RIGHT: DEBBIE PIERSON, JOHN EDWARDS, DAWN LOCKHART, MICHELLE BRAUN, GEORGE OWEN, JEFF WINKLER AND CONNIE HODGES.

Reinforcing the message of Good News in Tough Times, the RealSense Prosperity Campaign received three generous donations during the ceremonies, with check presentations from Greg Smith of Bank of America, Michelle Braun of Wachovia – A Wells Fargo Company, and John Edwards, President of the Northeast Florida Community Action Agency.

Michelle Braun, RealSense Community Chair, and Jeff Winkler, Director of RealSense Prosperity Campaign, thanked the many community partners present, including an entire table of representatives from WTEV CBS47 and WAWS FOX30. Braun also noted that for the third year in a row, Jacksonville Jaguars Rashean Mathis and mother, Oletha, are spokespersons for the

campaign. Stating that nothing could be accomplished without the ongoing support of the hundreds of volunteers who man the now 60 tax sites in eight counties, Winkler added that the success of the campaign during the past six years has been phenomenal. Since the program began in 2002, the total number of tax returns prepared has grown from 1,563 to 13,767 and the dollar amount for total returns has increased from \$1,564,300 to \$16,876,239 (979%)! In 2002, there were 60 tax site volunteers at 11 sites. In 2008, there were 400 volunteers at 53 sites, and those numbers continue to increase as the need also increases.

This year's RealSense Prosperity Campaign Ribbon Cutting Ceremony was an especially bright spot in the dim financial news of the day.

In addition to providing free income tax filing services, RealSense facilitates free financial education classes and the Individual Development Account (IDA) program, providing matched savings for qualified wage earners toward purchase of a home, a business or higher education.

**Tax Season is here. Take advantage of filing free and saving the fee! Call RealSense at 904-632-0600 or visit [www.realsensejax.org](http://www.realsensejax.org) to get locations, hours of operation and appointments.**



## TAX SEASON UPDATE

AS OF FEBRUARY 18, 2010

Tax Season Measure	2010	Compared To 2009	Difference
Total Returns Completed	3,283	2,012	63% ↑
Total Refund Dollars	\$8,365,476	\$4,784,276	75% ↑
EITC Returns Completed	1,668	982	70% ↑
EITC Refund Dollars	\$3,914,263	\$1,907,574	105% ↑
Total \$ Saved by Taxpayers w/RealSense	\$946,408	\$395,495	139% ↑

## NEWS BRIEFS

### Wachovia Recognizes RealSense at Jaguars/Colts Game

Through the generosity of Wachovia, a Wells Fargo Company, United Way President Connie Hodges and RealSense Director Jeff Winkler were selected as honorary Co-Captains of the Jaguars for the game and were able to go on the field to assist with the coin toss. Prior to the game, the RealSense Public Service Announcement featuring Jaguars player Rashean Mathis was played on the jumbotrons for all fans to see as Michelle Braun and Kelly Madden presented a check to RealSense in the amount of \$42,500!

RealSense would like to thank Wachovia/Wells Fargo for their wonderful support and the special recognition.

### Volunteer Update

To date, VITA, AARP Tax-Aide, and Benefit Bank trainers have taught a total of 34 volunteer training classes, yielding a total of 435 certified tax site volunteers. Many thanks to our dedicated Trainers and our new and returning volunteers for making this training season a huge success!

### FSCJ & Ken Amaro: On Our Side

Sharing information about the importance of financial education with tax site clients as they wait to have their return prepared has been a tough task for our volunteers over the years. Thanks to Robin Herriff and the TV Productions Staff at Florida State College at Jacksonville and Ken Amaro with First Coast News, RealSense clients are now able to watch an informational video as they wait to have their taxes prepared. The video, hosted by Ken Amaro, is composed of numerous educational and entertaining segments that provide financial tips, advice and information on financial education classes offered through RealSense. **To view the video, please visit [www.realsensejax.org](http://www.realsensejax.org).**

### Thank You!

RealSense would like to thank the following companies and organizations for providing either free tax preparation or financial education classes on-site to their employees:

- Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Florida
- First Coast Service Options
- Baptist Medical
- St. Vincent's Hospital
- St. Luke's Hospital
- Regions Bank
- Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Jacksonville Branch
- Suddath Company
- Family Care Partners

## MORE REAL NEWS!

### Bridging the Gap Between the Unbanked and Banked

An estimated 23% of local residents do not have a checking or savings account, leading to unnecessary costs and unhealthy financial management behaviors. This tax season, RealSense is piloting the use of pre-paid debit cards at the Gateway WorkSource and Heart of Putnam tax sites. Unbanked clients are able to enroll in a card prior to having their taxes prepared, and use it to have their refund check direct-deposited. Not only will these cards save our clients in check cashing and other fees, but it will also allow them to receive their refund up to two weeks sooner than if they had their check mailed to them.

### Wal-Mart Foundation and RealSense Team Up Again with Free Mobile Tax Preparation

Through a partnership between United Way Worldwide, the Wal-Mart Foundation and One Economy, a mobile tax van will make a two-week stop in Northeast Florida during its national tour to provide free tax preparation opportunities at a variety of locations. This is a great resource for employers, churches or community organizations. There are still dates where the van is available to book an event. For more information or to inquire about scheduling the van, please contact Linda Hemphill at 904-390-3237.