

Florida State College at Jacksonville – A New Name for an Old Friend of RealSense



In 2006, RealSense embarked upon a new partnership with then Florida Community College at Jacksonville (FCCJ). Since that time, both the college and the partnership with RealSense have flourished. Having recently announced their new name, Florida State College at Jacksonville continues to offer not only first-class educational opportunities, but also tax assistance and financial relief to members of our community.

What began as a lone tax site at the Florida State College of Jacksonville's (FSCJ) South Campus, where a grand total of 90 tax returns were completed, has now evolved into the establishment of additional tax sites at the North Campus in 2007, Kent Campus in 2008, and a brand new site at their Nassau Center for the upcoming tax season. College President, Dr. Steven Wallace affirms "It is with a great measure of pride and enthusiasm that Florida State College provides its full support to the Real Sense Prosperity Campaign." Since 2006, FSCJ tax sites have increased the number of clients served from 90 to 1,141, which represents an increase of 1,167%! Clients who took advantage of the free tax preparation services at all FSCJ sites since 2006 have saved over \$330,000 in preparation fees alone.

In addition to offering their campuses as tax sites, FSCJ has also played an integral role in the training of the VITA Volunteer Tax Preparers and Site Coordinators. Volunteer trainings have been held at the state-of-the-art Advanced Technology Center, Urban Resource Center and South Campus. Last tax season, approximately 250 volunteers attended training at FSCJ campuses.

Campus Presidents and staff members also play a major role in the success of this partnership, by identifying prime locations on campus to operate, offering IT support and access to computers and phones, recruiting student volunteers and marketing each site on campus and throughout the community. "It is my belief that programs do not help people, but rather people help people," says Jeff Winkler, Director of RealSense. "The tremendous support and commitment to excellence that FSCJ Campus Presidents and staff provide is unprecedented and a major reason for the continued growth and success of our efforts on their campuses."

With plans to open a new site at FSCJ's Nassau County Center this tax season, residents from Yulee, Hilliard and Callahan, who would normally have to travel to Jacksonville or Fernandina Beach for free tax preparation or use a paid preparer, will now have the option to go to a FSCJ free tax site within their own community and save hundreds of dollars as a result. Now that makes Real Sense!

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Trio of Excellence!

Manny Costa is all about teamwork. "I love the concept of Team Bank of America," says Costa, Vice President of Compliance and Operational Risk at Bank of America. "My career goals go hand-in-hand with reaching out as a volunteer and helping people in the community, and with RealSense, I've learned a lot about taxes!"

Now approaching his fourth tax season as a RealSense Prosperity Campaign volunteer, Manny has recruited over a dozen of his fellow Team Bank of America volunteers to join with him in providing free tax services to citizens served by the United Way partnership. "There are two reasons I've been able to recruit so many co-workers for RealSense," said Manny. "Those reasons are Gladys Marrero and Stempet Flores! They come to the bank and provide training that makes everyone very comfortable with the process. Gladys and Stempet are with the IRS and they really know what they're doing."



MANNY COSTA

Manny Costa, Gladys Marrero and Stempet Flores work together during tax season at St. Catherine's Catholic Church, the RealSense VITA tax site in Orange Park. "The community there is mostly Hispanic," notes Manny, "and Gladys and Stempet are bilingual, which really helps." The unique thing about St. Catherine's, according to Manny, is the family atmosphere that prevails. Stempet and Gladys are husband and wife and when they come in as a couple and begin setting up the site, the families they serve come in and help. "Gladys and Stempet have such a great reputation that they have built up a real following," said Manny. "There are people who come back every year now and tell others about it, too."

Just as vocal and complimentary as Manny Costa is when he talks of Gladys and Stempet, those are the sentiments echoed by the couple when they speak of Manny. "We knew Manny through Bank of America when he volunteered to work at our site," said Gladys. "Volunteers thought they had to speak Spanish because most of our taxpayers are Spanish speaking only. I explained to Manny that since we are bilingual, we can translate – and he explained this to a lot of Bank of America volunteers. He's been a great asset to the site for the past three years and has recruited several Bank of America volunteers. Our tax preparation has increased by more than 100 returns. All of our volunteers are committed to providing excellence in income tax preparation. Hopefully, next year we can train even more."

Wonder Woman Volunteer!



MAMIE BURKE

For seven years, Mamie Burke has generously given her time and talent as a VITA volunteer, whether greeting clients at a tax site, providing all-hands-on-deck assistance at a special event, or sharing RealSense resource information at community outreach activities. Through her role as Community Development Specialist at the Northeast Florida Community Action Agency, Inc., Mamie saw RealSense services as an invaluable means to help lower income families achieve greater financial stability and wanted to lend a hand as a volunteer. "My job entailed assisting low-income families to become more self-sufficient. RealSense was a great means to this end. In fact, my most rewarding career accomplishment is having inspired and empowered people to set and reach what they thought were unreachable goals." Mamie is especially eager for prospective clients and volunteers to learn more about RealSense. "We volunteers truly care about what we do and work hard to provide quality services to our clients," Mamie said. "My most inspiring moment as a volunteer was when a young man, after having his taxes prepared with RealSense, said, 'I'm going to have my mother's car fixed with the money you all saved me'. Amid her full schedule as a working woman, active volunteer, mother of three, and grandmother of six, Mamie enjoys curling up with a good book and traveling.



VOLUNTEERS GLADYS AND STEMPEP (CENTER, STANDING) WORK WITH A REALSENSE CLIENT (SITTING ON LEFT) AND JEFF WINKLER (SITTING ON RIGHT).

Attention Volunteers CREATE A FINANCIAL BUZZ AROUND TOWN!

If you have a heart for lending a hand to less fortunate working families and want to be part of uplifting your community, RealSense invites you to join the best and brightest group of volunteers in northeast Florida.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH: Help spread the good word about RealSense services as an Outreach Specialist by staffing information tables at community and organizational events and/or making brief presentations to small, friendly groups.

FINANCIAL EDUCATION: Learn to teach one or more financial classes (budgeting, managing a checking account, managing credit, etc.) or a comprehensive course (Money Smart) to small groups of working adults, eager to improve their economic situation by learning how to make better financial decisions.

FREE TAX PREPARATION: Many people dread doing their taxes or struggle and throw up their hands. Some are unaware of all the deductions they may be entitled to (or the Earned Income Tax Credit) and miss receiving the full refund they deserve. If you have basic computer skills or a bit of financial background, preparing income tax returns can be an interesting challenge, like solving a puzzle. Or maybe you have no experience in filing tax returns at all. Either way, RealSense offers volunteer tax preparation training taught by IRS.

To learn more, contact Linda Hemphill at 904-390-3276 or lindah@uwnefl.org. Be sure to visit RealSense on the web at www.realsensejax.org.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES & TRAINING CLASSES

- **Outreach Specialist/Speakers Bureau**
Tuesday, September 15, 2:00 – 4:00PM
- **Financial Education: Train-the-Trainer**
Thursday, September 10, 8:30AM - 4:00PM
- **Income Tax Preparer**
Training schedules to be posted in November

Community Empowerment Expo

BUILDING A PATHWAY TO PROSPERITY



The Community Empowerment Expo (CEE) is an event being driven by the City of Jacksonville's Blueprint for Prosperity initiative in partnership with the National Disability Institute. The goal for the event is to actively engage those in attendance in on-site programs and workshops that provide resources to underserved populations and particularly to individuals

who live below, at, or just above the poverty line.

The event is a coordinated effort to bring a variety of organizations and businesses together and offer actionable resources to the citizens who attend. This will be accomplished in two ways during the expo.

WORKSHOPS

Throughout the course of this community event, a number of workshops will be offered. The workshops will focus on key areas including credit repair, career building, operating on a limited budget, building wealth, leading a healthy life, housing/foreclosure, advanced training/education and more.

RESOURCE EXPO

This part of the event will contain more than 50 partnering agencies, businesses, organizations and groups. Each will have a table displaying information about their respective organizations. In keeping with the focus of the event, each partner must provide a program and/or service for attendees that is actionable in order for them to participate in the expo. Please be sure to visit the RealSense table to find out how our services can assist you in creating a brighter financial future.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT EXPO PARTNERS INCLUDE:

The City of Jacksonville, National Disability Institute, RealSense Prosperity Campaign, Bank of America, Clear Channel Radio, JTA, Duval County Health Department, BlueCross BlueShield of Florida, Internal Revenue Service, Jacksonville University, Ready 4 Work, WorkSource and more.