

EarnIt!KeepIt!\$aveIt!

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FREE TAX PROGRAM URGES FAMILIES TO RESIST EARLY RETURN TRAP

Millions in tax credits go unclaimed in Contra Costa every year

Every tax season many hardworking people make the same costly choice. They pay hundreds of dollars to a commercial tax preparation company to do their taxes when they could have had them done for free and gotten more money back.

The annual Contra Costa Earn It! Keep It! Save It! (EKS) free tax preparation program helps families and individuals claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which can amount to up to \$5,657 per family, as well as receive important financial resources. Millions of dollars in tax credits go unclaimed in Contra Costa County every year, said Contra Costa EKS Coordinator Carol Perez.

“Many people are unaware of the program and we’re trying to reach out to people who qualify in all areas of Contra Costa County. Tax refunds can make a huge difference for folks who often are struggling to make ends meet,” Perez said.

To qualify for EKS, household incomes must have been less than \$52,000 in 2009. The program runs Jan. 30 through April 15 at locations throughout the Bay Area. For site locations call 211 or visit www.earnitkeepitsaveit.org.

Last tax season, the EKS program helped 2,493 low to moderate-income families and individuals in Contra Costa receive more than \$3.5 million in total tax refunds and credits, Perez said. However, up to 25% of those eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit in Contra Costa County do not receive it, resulting in a loss of \$9–12 million to Contra Costa residents and their cities.

Sponsored by Contra Costa Family Economic Security Partnership (FESP), and operated by the Community Housing and Development Corporation, the EKS program is working to increase awareness about EITC and free tax assistance services throughout the county. FESP is a nonprofit, public and private collaboration dedicated to helping low-income Contra Costa residents increase their financial knowledge, well-being and assets, said Sean Casey, FESP chair and Executive Director of First 5 Contra Costa.

“The Earn It! Keep It! Save It! program helps to provide a financial boost to residents and the local economy. We want our hardworking residents to keep more of their money now, as well as build up their financial futures,” Casey said.

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