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## **First Lady Maria Shriver and Local Community Leaders Connect Low Income Families Across the State through WE Connect Campaign**

Today, First Lady Maria Shriver toured Northern California as part of her 2009 'WE Connect' Campaign, a groundbreaking public-private partnership designed to help California's working families. Through her WE Connect events, Shriver connected hundreds of families with the information and tools they need to take full advantage of valuable financial resources, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The push for WE Connect coincides with the start of tax season and at a time when families are in desperate need of community resources.

In Sacramento, the First Lady was joined by Senate President pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, Assembly Speaker Karen Bass (D-Los Angeles), Assemblymember Dave Jones (D-Sacramento) and Mayor Kevin Johnson. Stockton Mayor Ann Johnston joined Shriver in Stockton and Assemblymember Tom Tolarkson (D-Antioch) in Oakland.

"The worsening national economic climate makes it more important than ever to help California families get connected to a variety of support services to help during this challenging time," said First Lady Maria Shriver. "Millions of dollars in Earned Income Tax Credit go unused every year simply because families do not know that they are eligible to receive it. With such wonderful partners and community leaders, WE Connect can make a difference and give families the chance to get ahead."

Assembly Speaker Karen Bass said, "In tough times it's important to remember that we are all connected – that we are all in this together. The innovative public-private partnership Maria Shriver has mobilized with WE Connect gives California families valuable information and assistance to tap into the resources that are available to them. Being there for people in need is one of our most important human connections. WE Connect is certainly there for – and making a difference for – California families."

Since 2005, Shriver has raised awareness of the EITC through her WE Connect campaign, including other key resources to serve working families who work hard but struggle to make ends meet. In addition to the tax credit and financial incentive programs available, [www.WEconnect.net](http://www.WEconnect.net) aims to help people connect with resources to keep their homes, put food on the table and find a job in a time when unemployment is so rampant.

Intuit Inc. and its foundation participate in this public-private partnership by providing both financial and in-kind support. "In these difficult economic times, it's more important than ever to connect Californians with programs and services that can put money in their pockets, programs like the federal Earned Income Tax Credit. But to benefit from these programs, people have to be aware of them, understand their eligibility and know how to apply," said Brad Smith, president and CEO of Intuit Inc. "Intuit and our Intuit Financial Freedom Foundation are proud to continue our partnership with California First Lady Maria Shriver's WE Connect Campaign, lending our technological expertise to help the First Lady empower Californians to break down the barriers to these money-saving programs."

As one of the most innovative statewide efforts promoting the EITC, WE Connect uses all available channels to reach out to the over 625,000 eligible families in California who currently are not claiming this credit and also connects them with other key programs and services. The campaign partners with community organizations, statewide programs and major corporations to reach working families where they shop, eat, work, live and learn.

### **To achieve this, the WE Connect campaign includes the following components:**



#### **[www.weconnect.net](http://www.weconnect.net)**

This website is a one-stop-shop connecting Californians to programs and services for which they may be eligible. The site now houses an all-inclusive resource map, the first of its kind in the country, which connects visitors to hundreds of locations near them offering free tax assistance, job fairs and other resourceful events.



#### **WEb Connector**

The WEb Connector, the campaign's exclusive online tool, developed by partner Intuit for this campaign, helps working families determine exactly which of the nine programs they may be eligible for and how to apply - all with the click of a mouse.



### **WE Connect Events**

WE Connect events take place throughout the state in partnership with a network of statewide partners providing free tax preparation for eligible working families and individuals with one-on-one assistance. Families can learn about and apply for key services and programs while having the opportunity to have their taxes prepared for free. WE Connect materials, including the 2009 La Opinion supplement and 10 Tips for Financial Empowerment are made available at all events.



### **WE Connect Sunday**

Through a partnership with La Opinion, the nation's largest Spanish-speaking newspaper in the country, WE Connect has developed its second edition of a 24 page, full color, bi-lingual supplement that will be distributed to over 1.2 million Californians in need. The supplement contains pertinent information on all of the programs and services that the campaign covers and highlights success stories of those who have benefited from the resources provided.



### **Connecting Working Families in the Workplace**

WE Connect reaches out to working families through their workplace by providing information to a network of small businesses, business associations, unions, and small business development centers. Our goal is to engage small business owners in educating their employees about important resources that may help them. Materials available will include "Connector" tool kits, workplace posters and brochures, payroll inserts and email blasts.

For more information on Maria's WE Connect campaign, visit: [www.WEconnect.net](http://www.WEconnect.net). ###

## **About the WE Connect Partners**

The WE Connect campaign partners with community organizations, statewide programs, unions, small businesses and major corporations to connect with working families. **WE Connect partners include:** Intuit, The Governor and First Lady's Conference on Women, Legal Aid Society of Orange County, Central California Legal Services, California Volunteers, AmeriCorps, California Department of Social Services, United Way of Greater Los Angeles, United Way of Bay Area, La Opinión, California Association of Food Banks, ClearChannel, California First 5, SEIU, AFSCME, Save the Children, AT&T, PG&E, Sempra Energy Utilities, California Black Media Association, Visa, Inc., California Network of Small Business Development Centers, and Wal-Mart, in addition to over 200 regional organizations across the state.

## **Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services**

The Sacramento Food Bank & Family Services (SFBFS) is dedicated to assisting those in need by: Alleviating their immediate pain and problems and moving them toward self sufficiency and financial independence. SFBFS accomplishes the above goals through the following services: Educating the illiterate, providing moms with guidance and their infants with food and diapers, strengthening families through a program of ethics and self-esteem, providing early childhood education and youth services, feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, housing homeless families with children, furnishing seniors with a social club and volunteer opportunities, providing high-tech knowledge for youth.

## **Dorothy Jones Community & Health Center**

Dorothy L. Jones Community and Health Center is one out of five Family Resource Centers operated by the Community Partnership for Families of San Joaquin. The Community Partnership for Families was founded by leaders from neighborhood groups, the faith community, schools, public and private health, social service, criminal justice agencies, city, and county government, and the business community. The Partnership's mission is to promote policies and programs that enable all these groups to work together-in a systematic manner-to build strong and resourceful families and communities in San Joaquin County.

## **The Unity Council**

The Unity Council provides comprehensive workforce development services through its Multi-Cultural One Stop Career Center that specializes in serving limited English proficient clients and provides services in eight languages: Spanish, Laotian, Mien, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and English. The AmeriCorps members also participate as volunteers in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) project. This project has assisted over 1,500 families and has returned over \$750,000 in Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to our community. The AmeriCorps program has proven to be an excellent opportunity for youth from our community to develop into our future leaders.