

EITC Presentation

To Orange County Mayor and County Commissioners
Orlando, Florida
May 10, 2005

By David A. Odahowski, President
Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation, Inc

Thank you Mr. Mayor and County Commissioners.

The mission of the Edyth Bush Charitable Foundation is to help people help themselves. For 32 years, the Foundation has sought to leverage the resources of Mrs. Bush for the future good of our region through grants, programs, and collaboration, but we are only one organization. It is commendable when an entire community – governments, businesses, nonprofits, and volunteers – comes together to honor the hard working families of our community by helping them access a tax benefit from Washington, DC. This tax benefit gives families “Extra Credit” for working, “Extra Credit” for being a family, and ‘Extra Credit” for being an important part of our local economy.

The Earned Income Tax Credit, or EITC, is a Federal Program that offers a refundable credit – cold, hard cash, to working families – even if little or no income taxes are due. This cash refund can range from a few hundred dollars to over \$4,000 depending on family size and income. The Federal tax code allows eligible workers to file amended tax returns to claim the EITC from the previous three years if the worker was eligible. For eligible workers, it also allows for an advanced EITC that puts more money into paychecks now. The EITC is credited with being the single most effective Federal program for lifting families out of poverty and that means lifting children out of poverty!

When the Foundation learned that over 100 communities across this county had EITC community outreach efforts, the Foundation convened a group of community leaders. When our business community and your very able staff learned that tens of millions of dollars were not claimed by eligible workers in Orange County and remained unclaimed in Washington DC, this collaboration was forged. Its purpose was to give “Extra Credit” to our families who are most affected by the ebb and flow of our national economy; to those who are most affected by natural disasters such as last year’s hurricanes; and to those willing to do whatever it takes to support a family.

In 2002, 82,000 workers in Orange County filed for the EITC. The average EITC payment that year was \$1,844, with a total payment in Orange County of \$151 million dollars. It would not be a stretch of the imagination for me to say that everyone of us here and those watching on Orange TV know several people in our daily lives who qualify for the EITC but may not be aware of their eligibility – the single mom going to Valencia Community College, the new

immigrant family at our faith community, or a senior citizen taking care of and raising a grandchild.

In 2001, the IRS estimated that 20% of eligible residents of Orange County did not apply and conservatively 15 million EITC dollars were earned, but not claimed. The dollars not claimed can mean the difference between renting a house or home ownership; the difference between taking the bus and owning a car; and the difference between bills to pay or “paid in full.”

The Extra Credit campaign planning and development consisted of a business plan that leveraged dollars, volunteers, and other community resources such as the County’s Community Action Program; Orange TV; Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites, better known as VITA sites; the HR departments of business and government; the internet; utility bill inserts; and good old word of mouth!

The Extra Credit Community Advisory Committee was critical to the success of Extra Credit! If you had an idea or if you knew people who could benefit from the EITC you were welcomed. Community advisors came from the seven leadership circles of our community – business, government, community based organizations, neighborhoods, places of worship, older Americans, and younger Americans. The advisors helped, planned, guided and established best practices for the Campaign.

The Extra Credit Funders Committee was the policy steering committee receiving recommendations from the Community Advisory Committee, developing the deliverables, and monitoring the performance of Extra Credit campaign.

All of our Community Advisors were special, but let me single out Bank of America and Ed Timberlake, Market President, as “EXTRA SPECIAL”. Bank of America is known as a great corporate citizen here in Central Florida. It is a company with a head for business but with a heart for the community. Bank of America helped us launch the campaign at its downtown location, helped us to link up with the Heart of Florida United Way and it’s 211 service, and became the first bank in Florida, and maybe the nation, that waived the check cashing fee for non-customers’ EITC checks.

It is now my distinct pleasure to turn the contract deliverable portion of the presentation over to someone who belongs to a family legacy of service above self; someone who is a community asset builder and regional steward, Mr. Jacob Stuart from the Orlando Regional Chamber of Commerce.