



**Creating a future of opportunity.**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**UpValley Volunteers Generate \$684,000 in Tax Refunds and Reach Record Numbers**

UpValley Family Centers' Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program reached record numbers this year thanks to committed volunteers. A total of 36 trained volunteers and bilingual staff worked intensely this tax season to complete over 700 tax returns so far - generating a preliminary estimated \$684,000 in refunds.

"There is no question, our dedicated volunteers make a huge difference in our ability to provide services to our clients," says Jenny Ocón, Executive Director of the UpValley Family Centers. "They bring a variety of skills, current and former career experiences and actively work alongside our staff to make a big impact in the lives of working families and seniors living on fixed incomes. We couldn't do it without their kind hearts and commitment. And we all have fun along the way."

Since 2010, the UpValley VITA Program has generated over \$5.5 million in refunds to households earning less than \$54,000 per year thanks to volunteers and staff offering the free program in Calistoga and St. Helena. Most of the work is done between January and April, though the UpValley Family Centers offers this service year round (the only VITA site in Napa County to do so).

UpValley Family Centers relies on the goodwill of volunteers to expand community impact - in the VITA Program and more. Over 100 volunteers, from retired and current local corporate executives to high school and college students, apply their skills and passion to help others via citizenship classes, community resource events, holiday giving programs, and tutoring.

## 2018 VITA volunteer highlights



Ray Branstetter, retired engineer who lives in Calistoga, gets the award for the longest serving VITA volunteer. He's been supporting Calistoga VITA efforts for 13 years! In addition to loving "cleaning up tax issues for the families," he says, "all the staff are so happy here and Norma Godinez, the program coordinator, is really good. It's why I keep coming back."



Emily Armstead, Production Financial Analyst at Trinchero Family Estates, grew up in a St. Helena family that believes in community service. She's a newbie VITA volunteer and plans to come back next year. At 27, she's been working at Trinchero Family Estates for 3 years and loves it. "I like solving problems and when my friend (UVFC Board member Michael Caldarola - also a VITA volunteer) mentioned the need, it seemed like a great fit. The 20-hour IRS training was hard to fit in my workweek but I'm lucky. My colleagues at Trinchero Family Estates were flexible and encouraging."



Top Row: Marycruz Garcia, Norma Godinez, Ray Branstetter, Katya Orozco, Marcela Franco.

Second Row: Lourdes Gonzalez and Joleen Cantera

First Row: Irene Pena, Norma Ferriz, Tim Knutson, Bob Dye

A short 6 months ago, Tim Knutson retired as Chevron Senior Counsel and was looking for volunteer opportunities. He connected with Norma Ferriz, St. Helena's VITA program manager. "I got a lot out of helping folks and it opened my eyes to the challenges they are facing. I very much enjoyed working with UpValley Family Centers and its value to the community is obvious. I would be happy to do whatever I can in the future."

Marcela Franco of Mechanics Bank has volunteered in both our St. Helena and Calistoga offices for years. Being bi-lingual, Marcela has been integral to helping our clients. "I think the highlight each year is seeing their happiness when I tell them they are getting a refund!"

These are just a few of UpValley Family Centers' wonderful volunteers. VITA is generously sponsored by: Citibank, Auction Napa Valley/Napa Valley Vintners, Mechanics Bank, the Napa Valley Community Foundation and United Way Bay Area and many individual donors.

For more information on UVFC volunteer opportunities contact: Carolyn Dunn  
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