

Reaching Out

A publication of Southern Good Faith Fund

Asset Builders

Business Development Center

Career Pathways

Power To Care

Public Policy

New Year, New Opportunities

Welcome to our first newsletter of this important new year, where we find that “hope” has once again gained a foothold in our communities and across the nation, no matter the challenges that we face together as a community. No doubt, our economy is staggering, and realistically, it may take time to find our balance again. But time can be our ally; after all, there’s much to be done. So let’s get started. To begin this new year, in the spirit of our country’s new hope for the future, we’re ready to help you today.

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance

Are you are confused about tax laws? Do you know what credits and deductions that you can take? Do you know if you’re eligible for an Earned Income Tax Credit, or EITC? Do you need help with your taxes?

Southern Bancorp and Southern Good Faith Fund’s Volunteer Tax Assistance (VITA) program can help you. We began our IRS-sponsored VITA program in 2004 with just two sites in Southern Bancorp branches in Arkansas and Mississippi. Since then our program has grown to 11 sites, each with trained and certified volunteers who are ready to help you file your taxes and see your best possible return, free of charge.

And our free preparation has proven results. Last tax season alone, we helped over 2,000 people at our sites and brought over \$1.5 million in refunds to local communities. Importantly, \$1 million of this total resulted from Earned Income Tax Credits (EITCs).

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VITA Fast Facts

Free

No fees for tax preparation or electronic filing.

Fast

Get your return in half the time, even faster with Direct Deposit.

Accurate

Fewer errors mean fewer contacts with the IRS.

One-Stop

Electronically file both your federal and state returns.

Convenient

Our sites are open at days and times that make it easy for you to stop by.

VITA, continued from page 1

What is EITC?

The Earned Income Tax Credit is a credit for people who worked in a particular year but had modest earnings. This credit can reduce or eliminate your income taxes for the year and earn you a tax refund.

Do You Qualify for an Earned Income Tax Credit?

You are eligible for an EITC if:

- You worked full- or part-time in 2008.
- You are between the ages of 25 and 65.
- You are unmarried and your income is up to:
 - o \$12,880 for workers with no children.
 - o \$33,995 for workers with one qualifying child.
 - o \$38,646 for workers with two or more qualifying children.

- You are married and your income is up to:

- o \$15,880 for workers without a child.
- o \$36,995 for workers with one qualifying child.
- o \$41,646 for workers with two or more qualifying children.

Do You Qualify for a Child Tax Credit?

You may also qualify for a nonrefundable Child Tax Credit of up to \$1,000 per child who:

1. Is under age 17 at the end of the tax year.



VITA filer and Asset Builders and credit counseling client, Joann Taylor with VITA Volunteer Coordinator Vida Fielder.

2. Is a United States citizen, national, or resident.
3. Is claimed as your dependent.

continued on next page

VITA Sites and Contacts for More Information

Our sites are opened from January 20 through April 15, 2009, but don't delay. See below for more information or to schedule your appointment today.

Southern Bancorp in Arkansas

Arkadelphia

Tuesdays – Thursdays and Saturdays
601 Main Street
Cassy Frisby, 870.246.5811

Helena-West Helena

Tuesdays – Thursdays and Saturdays
502 Cherry Street
Vida Fielder, 870.816.1126

Hot Springs

Tuesdays – Thursdays and Saturdays
4138 Central Avenue
Amber Norman, 501.525.1114

Malvern

Tuesdays – Thursdays and Saturdays
208 Ash Street
Stacie Stewart, 501.337.4944

Marvell

Tuesdays – Thursdays
911 Highway 49
Leigh Ann Lammers, 870.816.2910

Pine Bluff

Southern Good Faith Fund
Tuesdays – Thursdays and Saturdays
2304 W. 29th Avenue
Blake Williams, 870.535.6233

Southern Bancorp in Mississippi

Clarksdale

Tuesdays – Thursdays and Saturdays
875 South State Street
Samantha West, 662.624.5776

Drew

Tuesdays – Thursdays
108 North Main Street
Kerenski Robinson, 662.745.6604

Greenville

Tuesdays – Thursdays and Saturdays
215 South Broadway
Ruby Johnson, 662.334.1898

Indianola

Tuesdays – Thursdays
507 Highway 82 East
Bern Miller, 662.887.9520

Leland

Ashley Zepponi, 662.686.6966

Ruleville

Debra Walker, 662.756.4343

Shelby

Tuesdays – Thursdays and Saturdays
905 North Broadway
Edna Bland, 662.398.5115

Webb

Dianna Melton, 662.375.8561

4. Is your son or daughter, adopted child, stepchild, eligible foster child, or a descendant of any of them, or is under your care as your own child if they are a brother, sister, step-brother, stepsister, or a descendant of any of them (for example, your niece or nephew).
5. Did not provide over half of his or her own support.
6. Lived with the taxpayer for more than half of the tax year.

What to Bring

Please bring the following proof of identification with you to the VITA site:

- Social Security Cards for you, your spouse, and dependents, and/or a Social Security Number verification letter issued by the Social Security Administration.
- Picture ID, like a drivers license.
- Wage and earning statement(s) Form W-2, W-2G, 1099-R, from all employers.
- Interest and dividend statements from banks (Forms 1099).
- A copy of last year's federal and state returns.
- Bank routing numbers and account numbers for direct deposit.
- Total paid for day care provider and the day care provider's Tax Identification Number (the provider's Social Security Number or the provider's business Employer Identification Number).



Upcoming IDA Classes

Pine Bluff

Classes are held at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. at Southern Good Faith Fund, 2304 W. 29th Ave.

*Free child care at the 6 p.m. class in Pine Bluff on Jan. 13, Jan. 27, Feb. 17, Mar. 10, Mar. 24, April 21, May 12, and May 26.

January

- 6 Information Meeting
- 13* AST-Home Ownership
- 20 Renting, Leasing, Buying (10 a.m.)
- 27* Spending as a Habit—Saving as a Goal

February

- 3 Information Meeting
- 10 AST-Education
- 17* Credit Management
- 24 Money Management (10 a.m.)

March

- 3 Information Meeting
- 10* AST-Home Repair
- 17 Financial Services (10 a.m.)
- 24* Money Management

April

- 7 Information Meeting
- 14 Spending as a Habit—Saving as a Goal (10 a.m.)
- 21* Credit Management
- 28 AST-Home Repair

May

- 5 Information Meeting
- 12* Financial Services
- 19 Renting, Leasing, Buying (10 a.m.)
- 26* AST-Home Ownership

Helena-West Helena

Classes during the week are held at 5:30 p.m. Saturday classes are from 10 a.m. - 2p.m. All classes are held at Southern Bancorp, 502 Cherry St.

January

- 8 Information Meeting
- 15 AST-Education

February

- 5 Information Meeting
- 12 AST-Post Purchase Repair

March

- 5 Information Meeting
- 12 Money Management

April

- 9 Information Meeting
- 16 Spending as a Habit—Saving as a Goal
- 25 AST-Homeownership A

May

- 7 Information Meeting
- 14 Financial Services
- 16 AST-Homeownership B
- 28 Credit Management

Mississippi

Classes are held at 6 p.m. at the Workforce Center, 510 Sunbelt Dr., Clarksdale. Information meetings are held at 5:30 p.m.

February

- 19 Information Meeting
- 19 Money Management

March

- 26 Information Meeting
- 26 Spending as a Habit—Saving as a Goal

April

- 30 Information Meeting
- 30 Financial Services

Arkadelphia

Information meetings are held at 5:30 p.m. and classes are held at 6:30 p.m. at Southern Bancorp, 601 Main St.

January

- 12 Information Meeting
- 12 Money Management

February

- 9 Information Meeting
- 9 Spending as a Habit—Saving as a Goal

March

- 16 Information Meeting
- 16 Financial Services

April

- 20 Information Meeting
- 20 Credit Management

May

- 18 Information Meeting
- 18 Renting, Leasing, Buying

(AST—Asset Specific Training)

Steps to Handle Today's Scary News

Have you been watching the news that continues predicting economic gloom and doom? Have you felt some despair and fear? Well, we want to offer you an alternative. Many economists do not agree about what we can expect the economy to do, but there is no doubt that this is a time of opportunity for each of us to make a difference in our financial lives and weather whatever storm awaits the American economy.

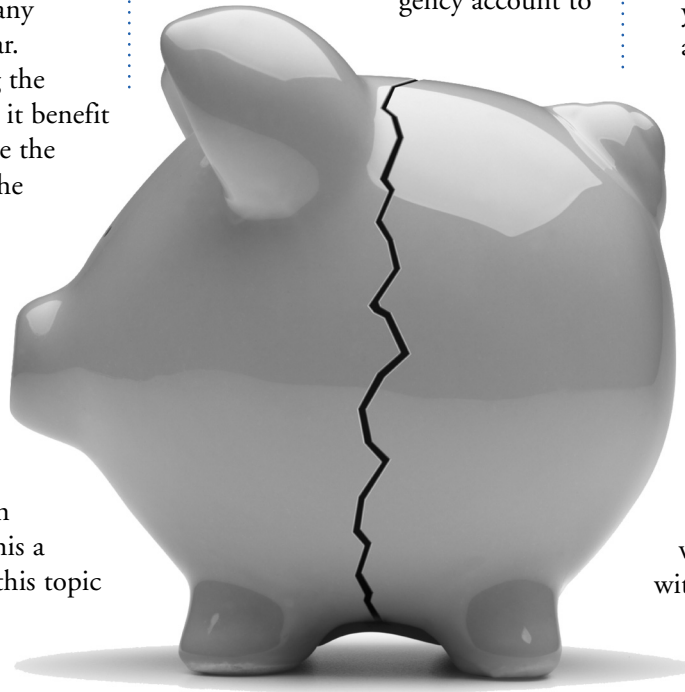
First, remember not to make any financial decision based on fear. Consider why you are making the decision: Is it emotional? Will it benefit you and your family? What are the short-term effects? What are the long-term effects?

Second, think of the many ways that you can cut your budget. In our last newsletter, we provided information on how to cut your grocery budget. Our suggestion this month is to ask yourself an important question when making purchases: "Is this a want, or a need?" We discuss this topic regularly in our economic skills training sessions, but in this unsure economy, this question becomes more important than ever. Remember we do not have to have everything that we want!

Third, tax season is here, so now is the time to decide what you will do with your tax return and, if you qualify, Earned Income Tax Credit. Make a budget for your anticipated return; if you decide in advance where your money will go, you will be less likely to "wonder where it went!"

Here are a few suggestions compiled by Asset Builders participants and staff for positive things that you can do with your tax return:

1. Make a deposit. Set up a regular savings account if you don't already have one, or make a deposit into your Individual Development Account (IDA) or emergency savings account. Remember, the IRS will "split" your return, letting you put a certain amount into multiple accounts. Making a savings deposit is even more critical than in years past. Having an emergency account to



- fall back on can give you peace of mind and help you weather a storm.
2. Pay down credit card balances, or even pay them off! One economist has noted that people without debt will not feel the same severe effects of this economy as those who are in debt.
3. Pay off small bills.
4. Make minor repairs to your home or automobile to save money in the long run.
5. Spend money on things that will last or improve your life, like a class

to increase your earning power. With the economic downturn, many jobs may be lost. Research the types of jobs that are in demand and take training in that field. (Remember that your IDA account can help you pay for this too!)

6. Create a 529 College Savings Plan to help your children pay for college, so they will be as prepared for the world as possible. We can help you figure out how to open your account and apply for the Aspiring Scholars Matching Grant program with the state of Arkansas, which provides matched savings to families making \$60,000 a year or less. Contact us today for more information.

With the beginning of the new year and your "extra" funds from your tax return, take this time to reflect on your spending and saving habits. Make a budget and stick to it! If you were running a business, you would not expect to be successful without a budget. Why should your personal finances be any different?

Finally, if you find yourself in financial trouble, behind on your mortgage or in foreclosure, or you just don't know where to start on your budget, call our credit counselors today. You have options, and they are trained to help you figure out what's right for your situation, for your life. Whether you need just a little advice, or a lot of help, they are here to help you, and only a phone call away. In Pine Bluff, call Frances Newsome at 870.535.6233 extension 23 or toll free 1.888.323.6233 extension 23; in Helena-West Helena, call Vida Fielder at 870.816.1126.

Sunset for Payday Lenders

Arkansas consumers have special reason to celebrate a new year as 2009 dawns, thanks to decisive actions by Attorney General Dustin McDaniel and by the Arkansas Supreme Court.

On January 1, 2008, there were 239 payday lenders in Arkansas charging borrowers triple-digit interest rates for short-term loans. A little over 11 months later, there are just 80 such lenders still making loans—a remarkable 66 percent decline.

What caused this predatory industry to wither so quickly in the Natural State? For almost a decade, payday lenders rode high in Arkansas, even drafting and persuading the state Legislature to pass a 1999 state law—the Check-cashers Act—designed provide legal cover for these businesses to operate. The Check-cashers Act was nothing less than a deliberate effort to evade the Arkansas Constitution’s clear prohibition against charging more than 17 percent annual interest on consumer loans.

For payday lenders in Arkansas, 2008 began with bad news. The Arkansas Supreme Court in January and February 2008 ruled in two decisions that payday lenders were not exempt from the state Constitution’s usury provision. The rulings prompted the Attorney

General in March 2008 to launch a crackdown on payday lenders.

Within three months, the number of payday lenders in Arkansas had dwindled to just 136. In August 2008, the Arkansas State Board of Collection



Rulings by the Arkansas Supreme Court in 2008 prompted the Attorney General to launch a crackdown on payday lenders.

The 80 holdout payday lenders have signaled they will continue making loans despite the court ruling. Attorney General McDaniel has pledged to “end this practice [payday lending] across the state of Arkansas” and before the latest court ruling had already filed multiple

Since January 1, 2008, there are just 80 remaining payday lenders still making loans in Arkansas—a remarkable 66 percent decline.

Arkansans Against Abusive Payday Lending (AAAPL), a coalition of organizations including Southern Good Faith Fund, played a key role in raising public awareness about the abuses of payday lending. AAAPL issued a series of reports that documented how many payday lenders weren’t even following the minimal requirements of the Check-cashers Act. Over the next four years, AAAPL issued half a dozen reports highlighting the abusive practices of this industry which operates using a business model of keeping customers drowning in long-term debt.

Agencies, the agency charged with regulating payday lenders, finally voted to regulate all payday lenders in Arkansas. Shortly thereafter, the nation’s largest payday lender, Advance America, announced plans to close all of its locations in Arkansas by October 31, 2008.

Most significantly, the Arkansas Supreme Court on November 6, 2008, in a long-awaited decision ruled unanimously that the Check-cashers Act “in its entirety, clearly and unmistakably conflicts with our constitution and is unconstitutional.”

lawsuits against other defiant payday lenders.

In response to the clear demand for non-predatory alternatives to payday loans, Southern Good Faith Fund’s parent company Southern Bancorp has committed to develop a program that will provide small, short-term, affordable loans for working families.

Consumers who still owe money on payday loans and have questions or concerns can contact the Attorney General’s office in Little Rock at 501.682.2007 or 1.800.482.8982.

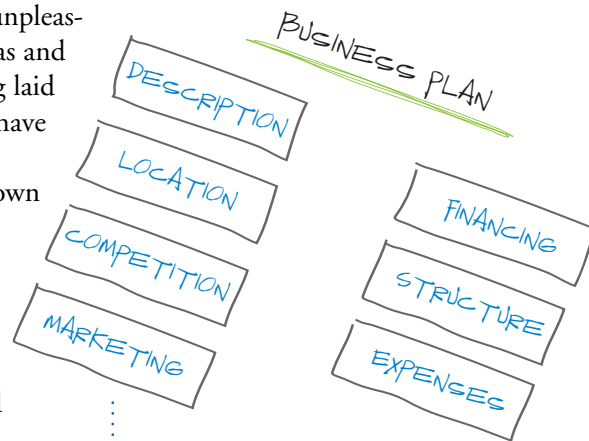
Get Acquainted With All The BIC Has To Offer At Our Open House!

February 13, 2009

Almost every day brings more unpleasant news about the economy, gas and food prices, and workers getting laid off. But the tough times don't have to be a barrier to starting a new business. In fact, many well known businesses like Disney and Microsoft began during a recession. Experts agree that starting a business now has some advantages for entrepreneurs armed with careful research and a solid business plan.

The Business Information Center (BIC) is the perfect place to start your planning. Southern Good Faith Fund is unveiling the newly updated BIC at an Open House celebration on February 13 with refreshments provided by local small businesses. The event will also feature modern art, photography, and ceramics created by Louis Skinner, a local critically acclaimed artist, and Chotsie Murphy. Both are recent graduates of the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff.

The BIC is a one-stop small business planning and resource center. The great news for business owners is that you no longer have to spend endless hours creating business materials from scratch.



There are also two business counselors who can provide invaluable advice and services free of charge to aspiring and existing business owners.

The BIC offers:

- A FREE wireless Internet hot spot for individuals to access with their own laptop computers.
- A technology center with four state-of-the-art computers with Internet access and loaded with a variety of business software, a laser printer, fax, scanner, and copy machines.
- A library with various business periodicals, how-to publications,

magazines, trade journals and sample business plans.

- An information corner featuring literature on SGFF programs, CD-ROMs and DVDs, resources for starting a business, health insurance for small businesses, tips and advice from the Arkansas Attorney General's Office, and resources for Veterans and Hispanic-Americans.
- An Entrepreneur's "Spot-Light" featuring products and services of local small businesses.
- A training room offering long and short-term trainings.

Located in the SGFF office at 2304 W. 29th in Pine Bluff, the BIC is open weekdays from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. and evenings by appointment. Men and women who are in business or interested in starting a business can use the BIC as often as they wish at no charge.

For more information, call Felecia Burns or Kim Jones Sneed at 870.535.6233 or toll-free at 888.323.6233. You can also email us at fburns@southernngff.org or ksneed@southernngff.org.

Business Information Center Open House

Friday, February 13

10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Stop by for refreshments and see the newly updated BIC and all it has to offer small business owners.

BDC is partially funded by the U.S. Small Business Administration's Office of Women's Business Ownership (OWBO) under Cooperative Agreement Number (SBAHQ-04-W-0032). The Office of Women's Business Ownership is established to help women become full partners in economic development through small business ownership. The Women's Business Ownership homepage is: www.wbconline.gov. BDC is a public-private partnership of the U.S. Small Business Administration and Southern Good Faith Fund, a non-profit affiliate of Southern Bancorp. SBA's cooperation does not constitute or imply its endorsement of any opinions, products, and/or services. Reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities will be made if requested at least two weeks in advance. Contact Miriam Karanja, 2304 W. 29th Ave., Pine Bluff, AR 71603 or call 870.535.6233. All SBA programs provided on a nondiscriminatory basis.

Upcoming Training At The Business Development Center

Get the complete schedule on our Web site at www.southernngff.org

First Step™ FastTrac® How to Start a Successful Small Business

A hands-on program to help entrepreneurs start, manage, and grow a successful small business.

January 27 in Pine Bluff

February 5 in West Memphis

Understanding Your Credit

Learn how to read your credit report, dispute errors, draft a budget, and take steps to prevent identify theft.

February 17, April 21 in Pine Bluff

Budgeting and Money Management

Develop a personal budget to help eliminate debt, save money, and live within your means.

February 24 in Pine Bluff

Child Care Licensing Requirements

Learn what is required to obtain a license to operate a child care business.

January 15, March 19, and May 14 in Pine Bluff

Wednesdays (call for dates) in Forrest City

Networking Breakfast

Meet other business owners and professionals during this breakfast.

January 6, February 3, March 3, and April 7 in Pine Bluff

January 22 in West Memphis

March 25 in Forrest City

April 19 in Helena-West Helena

How to Market Your Business Using e-Bay

Internet sales can significantly grow your small business. Learn all about e-Bay and how you can buy and sell online.

January 20 in Helena-West Helena

May 28 in Pine Bluff

Introduction to QuickBooks

Learn accounting/bookkeeping basics and QuickBooks' capabilities.

February 12, April 16 in Pine Bluff

February 17 in Helena-West Helena

April 23 in West Memphis

How to Market Your Business on the Web

Learn the basics of Web design and online promotions to increase customers.

March 12 in Pine Bluff

The Business Side of Child Care

This course is ideal for those who want to start or expand a child care business.

April 9 in Pine Bluff

April 28 in Forrest City

Minority Business Certification

Learn about the bidding process and other resources to obtain private and government contracts.

January 17, 24, and 31 in Forrest City

To learn more about these classes and others, give us a call at 870.535.6233 or visit our Web site at www.southernngff.org.

A tough economy
may be the perfect
time to start or fine-
tune your business.
Our upcoming classes
are a great place to
start.

small
business

Career Pathways

CNA Training in 2009 is a Go!

In our last client publication in October, we let you know that after 10 years of providing an important program to our local community—our Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) class—the funding to allow us to continue was uncertain. But good news, we have received word that our funding has been continued! Currently, we have

a waiting list of over 100 students for our first class, and we will be calling that list of students very soon. Thank you so much for your interest and patience as we worked to keep the class going. And please stay tuned for more information about our new nurse instructor, and this much-in-demand program.



CNA Graduate Camille Walker at her 2008 graduation ceremony: "This class has brought me joy, peace, and happiness in my life."

Offices

Pine Bluff

2304 W. 29th Avenue
Pine Bluff, AR 71603

Asset Builders
Business Development Center
Career Pathways
870.535.6233

Arkadelphia

601 Main Street
Arkadelphia, AR 71923

Asset Builders
870.246.1055

Helena-West Helena

502 Cherry Street
Helena-West Helena, AR 72342

Asset Builders
870.816.1104

Business Development Center
870.816.1120

Little Rock

1400 W. Markham, Suite 400
Little Rock, AR 72201

Public Policy
501.661.0322

Web Site

For more information visit:
www.southernngff.org

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