

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# UNITED WAY ANNOUNCES CHANGE IN ERIE FREE TAXES PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

## *Marybelle Martin joins team; longtime director Cheryl Bates to retire*

United Way of Erie County has announced the hiring of Marybelle Martin as the new program director for its Erie FREE Taxes program. This comes after the planned retirement of longtime program director, Cheryl Bates.

Cheryl shared, “I have enjoyed my 10-year employment with United Way of Erie County as program director of Erie FREE Taxes. United Way provided me with the supports needed to grow an anti-poverty program within Erie County that has given thousands of tax filers and their families an opportunity to become more financially stable. Under new leadership, I am confident that the program will continue to serve people with the highest degree of commitment and professionalism.” We can’t thank Cheryl enough for her dedication to crushing poverty in Erie County and wish her a very happy retirement.

Marybelle’s background includes extensive experience in the field of social services in Erie, as well as two decades of experience in management and business ownership. Marybelle is a Gannon University graduate and a member of the Anti-Human Trafficking Coalition Force in Erie.

United Way president Bill Jackson said, “Under Cheryl’s leadership Erie FREE Taxes has brought in over \$107 million to hard-working local tax filers while saving them an estimated \$16 million in commercial tax preparation fees over the past 14 years. We thank Cheryl for her dedication and look forward to working with Marybelle to take the program to even greater heights.”

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### **About United Way's Erie FREE Taxes program:**

Through the IRS Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA), Erie FREE Taxes provides free tax preparation service to Erie County tax filers and ensures that every eligible filer claims the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The EITC, one of our county's most effective anti-poverty tools, lifts more than 8 million adults and children above the poverty line. It provides a cash credit that boosts incomes of low-to-moderate income workers, helping them meet their basic needs. For those who receive the credit, it may enable them to save for emergencies, pay down debt, or put a down payment on a home. Since 2007, Erie FREE Taxes Program has demonstrated strength as a family and community economic development tool. 2019 was a milestone year for the program, having reached a program value of over **\$100 million**. Up to that point, Erie FREE Taxes volunteer tax preparers were responsible for returning \$88 million in federal refunds while saving filers an estimated \$13 million in commercial tax preparation fees.

By providing free tax preparation and access to the Earned Income Tax Credit, United Way Erie FREE Taxes has assisted thousands of Erie County residents to become more financially stable and to begin a path towards self-sufficiency. The program is a key example of United Way of Erie County living its mission, to Crush Poverty, and to increase the well-being of Erie County families and neighborhoods.

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