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Family Credit Counseling Service Expands Get Checking Program in Illinois

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Company President Addresses Chicago Fed, Area Banks About Free Consumer Financial Education for the "**Unbanked**"

Family Credit Counseling Service (FCCS), a national non-profit credit counseling organization, is expanding its free educational classes for people who currently **do not have a bank account** or who have difficulty managing an existing account. FCCS soon will offer Get Checking(TM) classes throughout part of the western suburbs surrounding Chicago and western and northwestern Illinois. The program expansion was announced yesterday in conjunction with a session of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, at which FCCS President Michael McAuliffe addressed area financial institutions about the program's benefits and successes.

An estimated 10 percent of Americans, or 40 million consumers, are "**unbanked**," according to the Federal Reserve Bank. Educating these consumers on the importance of deposit accounts can help them avoid involvement with fringe banking services such as payday loan operations and check stores, McAuliffe said in his remarks, saving them from substantial interest rate costs and improving their overall quality of life.

McAuliffe adds, "Our free Get Checking Program is a natural extension of our charter, which is to help families improve financial health and

reduce stress through debt management assistance, credit education and budget counseling." The program - which is coordinated by the University of Wisconsin, supported by eFunds Corporation and taught by FCCS educators - helps consumers build a solid relationship with financial institutions. "Graduates" of the course receive a certificate that is used to open an account at participating financial institutions.

Participating financial institutions in Illinois include Citizens Equity First Credit Union, U.S. Bancorp's U.S. Bank, Wells Fargo & Company's community banking stores, National City Bank, Members Alliance Credit Union, Blackhawk State Bank and Alpine Bank, some of which were represented at yesterday's Chicago Fed session.

Free is Key

Unlike most organizations that offer Get Checking, Family Credit Counseling Service does not charge consumers for the classes. "As a non-profit, our federal status is based on providing true non-biased financial education for consumers," says McAuliffe. "As such, charging for this service would not be appropriate. We don't." Rockford, Ill.-based FCCS currently hosts free Get Checking classes in addition to its other no-charge services like credit-score education and budget counseling.

The Get Checking program was launched to help consumers develop the practical skills needed to manage banking services effectively, while offering nearly everyone the opportunity to open a bank account despite past banking mistakes. Once a consumer successfully completes six hours of instruction, passes an exam and pays restitution to all financial institutions they owe, they can show a certificate of completion and open a deposit account with any of Get Checking's 80+ participating financial institutions.

Family Credit Counseling Service has been an educational partner and promoter of the Get Checking program since June 2004 and has successfully completed two courses, benefiting 35-40 attendees.

For additional information on the Get Checking program or to register for a course, please call an expert debt counselor at 1-800-994-3328.

About Family Credit Counseling Service

Family Credit Counseling Service (FCCS) is a non-profit agency providing an alternative for those seeking financial assistance. FCCS,

headquartered in Rockford, Illinois, is one of the largest consumer credit counseling agencies and has been servicing consumers throughout the country since 1996. FCCS's mission is to reduce the stress in consumer's lives through education, budget counseling and debt management. For more information call 1-800-994-3328 or visit <http://www.familycredit.org>.

Notes:

Scottsdale, Ariz.-based eFunds Corporation (EFD) provides electronic transaction processing, ATM, risk management, and outsourcing solutions to financial institutions, EFT networks, government agencies and retailers worldwide. Minneapolis-based U.S. Bancorp (USB) is the sixth largest financial services holding company in the United States. San Francisco-based Wells Fargo (WFC) operates 3,076 community banking stores in the United States.

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