

THE WEST FLORIDA WAY

Tax Season is in Full Swing with VITA!

In the first three weeks of Tax Season, VITA accomplished the following:

257 accepted tax returns

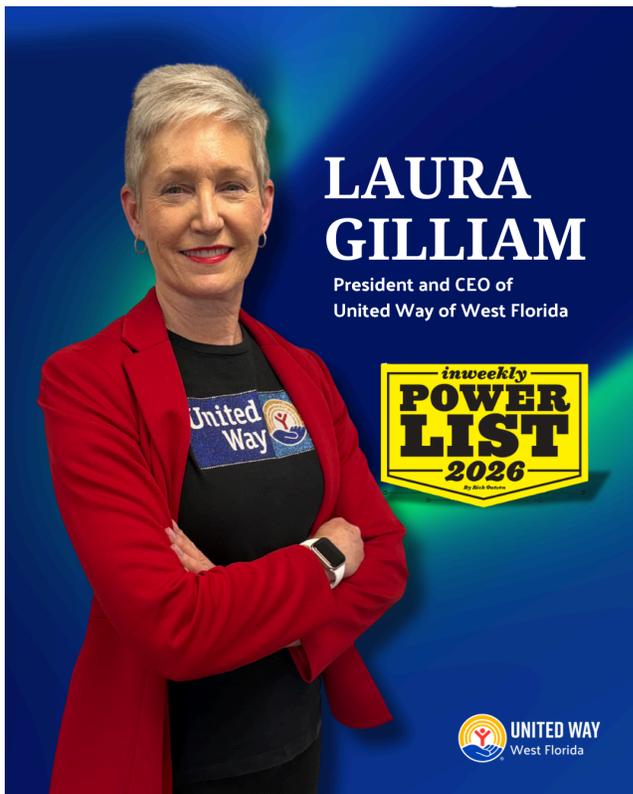
\$528,075 in refunds returned to the community

\$40,000 saved in filing fees

260 volunteer hours contributed

\$8,500 in volunteer impact value

[Book a VITA Appointment HERE](#)



We're proud to share that our President & CEO, Laura Gilliam, has been included in the **2026**

February 2026



Employee Spotlight: Jessica Johnson, VP of Impact Services

At United Way of West Florida, meaningful change happens because of dedicated leaders who turn compassion into action.

As Vice President of Impact Services, Jessica Johnson plays a vital role in connecting community needs with real solutions—working alongside partners, supporting programs, and helping ensure resources reach the people who need them most.

Her leadership helps drive the mission forward every day, strengthening the impact we have across our community. In this spotlight, Jessica shares more about her role, what inspires her, and the difference she hopes to make.

Click the link below to learn more about her journey, what drives her, and the impact she's

Power List by Inweekly!

This recognition reflects her impactful leadership and the positive influence she continues to have across our community. Through her dedication and vision, United Way of West Florida is driving meaningful change and strengthening lives throughout Escambia and Santa Rosa counties.

Congratulations, Laura, on this well-deserved honor — your leadership inspires us all! ❤️

helping create—her story is one you won't want to miss.

[Read Jessica's Story Here](#)



Mini Grant Applications Open Feb. 27!

The 2026 Mini Grant Application from United Way of West Florida opens Friday, February 27! ❤️ Grants up to \$5,000 are available for grassroots nonprofits in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties to support capacity-building efforts like accounting, professional development, and consulting.

 **Attendance at one Mini Grant training is required** (Feb. 24 virtual or Feb. 26 in-person). Learn more & register [here](#).



MEET ALICE

(Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed)

VIRTUAL INFO SESSIONS

Who is ALICE?

Join United Way of West Florida for a **one-hour virtual session** exploring ALICE households—the hardworking families who struggle to make ends meet in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. Learn about ALICE's history, local impact, and ways you can support and advocate for these families.

When: Last Wednesday of each month, Feb–Oct, 11:30 am–12:30 pm
Next Session: Wednesday, February 25

Register [here](#).

Upcoming Events

Glitz and Gallop Gala

Dust off your biggest hats and sharpest bow ties! Our annual **Glitz & Gallop Gala** returns on **May 2, 2026**, from 4:00 PM – 7:00 PM at the **Sanders Beach-Corinne Jones Resource Center**.

Early interest is already high, so mark your calendars and **get your tickets now**, you won't want to miss the event of the season!



Buy Tickets



Get Involved



Volunteer

Ready to give back? Whether you want to mentor a student, help at a food pantry, or assist with our VITA tax sites, **Get Connected** is your one-stop shop for volunteering.



Give a Hand, Donate Today!

Your generosity fuels every program mentioned in this newsletter. From providing free tax prep to lifesaving mental health training, your gift stays local and creates lasting change for

Explore hundreds of local opportunities in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties and find the perfect match for your schedule and skills. Join thousands of neighbors who prove that **United is the Way.**

[Volunteer Opportunities](#)

families in Escambia and Santa Rosa counties.

Whether it's a one-time gift or a monthly contribution, every dollar helps us build a stronger, more resilient West Florida.

[Donate Now](#)

Check Out Our Latest Blogs



Evolution for Impact: Strategic Changes to the UWWF Community Investment Grant Process

United Way of West Florida remains committed to building a stronger, more resilient community by tackling the root causes of our region's most pressing challenges. As part of this commitment to Community Investment, the Board of Directors, at the recommendation of the community-based Visioning Team, approved a thoughtful transition in our grant-making process. These enhancements are designed to create greater long-term stability for our funded partners and the individuals and families they serve across Escambia and Santa Rosa counties.

Transitioning to a Multi-Year Cycle

The most significant shift is the move from a one-year grant to a two-year grant cycle. This transition involves an adjustment to the traditional timeline and allows applicants and funded agencies to focus on more sustainable long-term approaches to services and less on the yearly application process. As a result of the timeline adjustment, there will be a six-month gap in the application cycle.

"By extending the cycle to two years, the focus moves from short-term to long-term outcomes," says Julia Helton, UWWF Community Impact Senior Manager. "This change gives funded agencies the breathing room to focus more on their mission and less on the administrative cycle of annual applications, ultimately allowing for the measurement of real, lasting change in the lives of neighbors."

Read the whole story [here](#).



When Women Unite, Communities Thrive

On February 9, 2026, more than 30 remarkable women gathered at The Makery in Pace for an evening filled with creativity, connection, and community purpose. Hosted by Women United, the dynamic donor network of United Way of West Florida, this gathering celebrated the power of women leading with heart and making a tangible difference across Escambia and Santa Rosa counties—especially for families and individuals in the ALICE population. Read the rest of the story [here](#).



More Than a Bag of Food: How Manna is tackling Hunger in Escambia and Santa Rosa Counties

In Escambia and Santa Rosa counties, hunger doesn't always look like what people expect. Sometimes it looks like a full-time job that doesn't quite cover rent and groceries. Sometimes it looks like a senior choosing between medication and food. Sometimes it looks like a federal employee furloughed during a government shutdown.

And sometimes, it looks like a family walking through the doors of Manna Food Pantries for the first time — unsure, but hopeful.

For decades, Manna has served as a grassroots response to food insecurity in our community. But under the leadership of Executive Director DeDe Flounlacker, the organization has evolved

into something more than a food partner. It is a connector, a data-informed partner, and a frontline responder to changing community needs. Read the rest of the story [here](#).



Building Wellness With Healthy Schools Escambia



Healthy Schools Escambia has recently partnered with Tee's House to bring outdoor gardens to West Pensacola Elementary School. These new gardens will give students hands-on opportunities to learn about growing their own food, healthy eating, and environmental stewardship, while fostering pride and connection to their school community.

Tee's House, a Pensacola-based nonprofit, empowers local communities through food access, youth development, and creative programs—making this collaboration a perfect way to help kids thrive mind, body, and spirit.

This partnership has led to the creation of a Garden Club at West Pensacola Elementary! If you would like to be involved, email Carol.dorough@uwwf.org for more information.



211 Day Coloring Contest Winners

All four Healthy Schools Escambia schools celebrated 211 Day with a fun coloring contest, and we loved seeing the creativity of our students! Congratulations to ALL our winners, whose

colorful artwork brightened the day and helped raise awareness about the valuable services 211 provides to our community. Here are a few of the many winners with their prizes!!

Operation Warm Wrap-Up



No child should go without essentials! Thanks to United Way of West Florida, Anderson Subaru, My Father's Vineyard & Operation Warm, 144 local kids got brand-new shoes last Saturday!



UWWF staff also helped Ret. Command Sergeant Major Raymond McKnight's family carry on Ray's legacy of donating socks to those in need at the event.

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