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**SUNCOAST WORKFORCE TO OFFER MICROSOFT TECHNOLOGY TRAINING VOUCHERS**

*Microsoft to provide Floridians with no-cost training, certification exams through the Microsoft Elevate America program*

(SARASOTA)— The Suncoast Workforce Board is working with Workforce Florida Inc., the Agency for Workforce Innovation and Microsoft as part of an innovative public-private partnership to provide free technology training to individuals across the state. Through Microsoft® Elevate America, Microsoft will donate to the state of Florida 35,000 vouchers for no-cost, online technology training and certification through any of the state's 24 Regional Workforce Boards.

The Suncoast Workforce Board received 1163 vouchers, including 515 E-Learning vouchers, 515 Business Certification exam vouchers and 133 IT Professional vouchers.

Each training voucher is redeemable for one E-Learning course or Certification exam. E-Learning courses, available online, are self-paced and offer beginning and intermediate training on Microsoft Windows or on one of the programs in the Microsoft Office Suite. Also offered are IT Professional vouchers for courses tailored to the needs of individuals on technical professional career tracks in areas such as web development or database management. Certification exams must be taken at Certiport Testing Centers, some of which may charge a small fee for exam proctoring.

Florida vouchers are available through August 21 or while supplies last. All vouchers must be activated by August 21 and Certification exam vouchers must be activated and used by the same date. E-Learning vouchers are good for 12 months after the date of activation.

Elevate America is part of Florida's ongoing efforts to provide resources to individuals and employers seeking talent development resources. The initiative was launched in Tallahassee Monday with a news conference by Governor Charlie Crist and leaders from Workforce Florida, the Agency for Workforce Innovation and Microsoft.

“Microsoft’s timing could not be better,” said Chris Hart IV, Workforce Florida President and CEO. “The workforce system’s No. 1 priority is getting Floridians back to work, and this initiative is one more tool to help us do that across the state. In particular, we are committed to increasing digital access and literacy in Florida. Elevate America is not only helping us advance that goal, but it also is shoring up our efforts to raise awareness of the importance of digital literacy and access to every Floridian.”

Floridians can find an electronic voucher application by visiting <http://elevateamerica.floridajobs.org/> or by contacting the Suncoast Workforce Board at [ElevateAmerica@swdb.org](mailto:ElevateAmerica@swdb.org).

Florida is the 24<sup>th</sup> state to participate in Elevate America, a groundbreaking initiative to prepare workers for the demands of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy. “We created the Elevate America program to help equip people with the critical technology skills they need in today’s competitive workplace,” said Terrance Herron, Director of State Government Affairs at Microsoft Corporation. “We believe this type of public-private partnership will play an important role in rebuilding Florida and the nation’s economy by offering immediate access to basic technology literacy and skills training to ultimately improve recipients’ employment prospects.”

Microsoft announced the Elevate America program at the National Governors Association Winter Conference in February 2009. The initiative is expected to provide up to 1 million vouchers nationwide for Microsoft E-Learning courses and select Microsoft Certification exams at no or low cost to recipients. The program is a part of Microsoft’s overall efforts to provide technology training for up to 2 million people during the next three years.

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