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FINANCIAL EDUCATION FAIR TEACHES DECISION-MAKING SKILLS TO STUDENTS *Participants from Early College Opportunity High School, Taos High School and Mora High School in Santa Fe, Taos and Mora participated in hands-on financial literacy fair*

(Santa Fe) – Thanks to a grant from the National Credit Union Foundation, students in three northern New Mexico cities recently had the hands-on opportunity to learn about finances and how to calculate earnings and expenses in the real-world setting of Guadalupe Credit Union's CU 4 Reality™ Financial Education Fair. Staff and volunteers met with more than 1,050 senior students in Santa Fe, Taos and Mora high schools to expose them to the important financial decisions they'll need to make as they get older.

"Spending money has never been easier than it is today, especially for our young people," said Winona Nava, President & CEO of Guadalupe Credit Union. "Too many students are learning to live beyond their means, because only a fraction of them are learning to manage their personal finances in school. We felt a hands-on experiential learning exercise would help make it more real than just numbers in a book."

According to the Jump\$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy, nearly a third of all high school seniors use at least one credit card, nearly half use ATM cards and more than three-quarters have a savings or checking account. However, just 20% of high school seniors graduate with any formal instruction in personal finance.

Diane Sandoval, Guadalupe Credit Union's Financial Empowerment Coaching Manager, said, "The CU 4 Reality curriculum creates a fun and interactive learning environment where students can practice specific financial management skills and learn early on the consequences of getting in over their head when it comes to financial matters. We had quite a few students who had to get new jobs or start over because of their initial spending decisions. The fair was a real wake-up call for some of the kids."

Participating in a Reality Fair propels the students through the personal financial management process, including career selection, budgeting for housing, transportation, luxuries, and more. Each student receives a folder detailing his or her personal information specific to their career choice. After calculating their take-home pay, they create a monthly spending plan as they progress through booths representing various expenses they may incur, including food, clothing, housing, transportation, insurance, home furnishings, savings, investments, entertainment and credit. Based on their lifestyle scenario, they will also see alternatives provided and make choices based on their own values, goals and resources.

"The reactions and feedback from the students was telling," exclaimed Nava. "They said things like, 'It's better to stay in school so I can get a good job,' 'Now I know what my parents go thru,' and 'I learned what you really need and don't.' GCU wants fill the need we see for financial education and continue to provide the information these kids need to become strong, financially healthy adults."

Special thanks to the non-GCU Reality Fair Volunteers for helping make the fairs run smoothly, including Northern New Mexico Schools Credit Union, Zia Credit Union, CUNA Mutual Insurance, Horace Mann Insurance and the Credit Union Association of New Mexico.

ABOUT GCU: Member-owned and not-for-profit Guadalupe Credit Union (GCU) is a certified Community Development Financial Institution that has served Northern New Mexico since 1948. Anyone who lives or works in Santa Fe, San Miguel, Rio Arriba, Mora, Torrance or Taos counties is invited to join. GCU is an equal opportunity and housing lender and is federally insured by the National Credit Union Association.

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