

MONEY**Banks recruiting low-income families**

Low fees or no fees offered

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On payday Fridays, large numbers of Napa County workers with no bank accounts are likely to pay fees to cash their checks and wire money home.

People without bank accounts spend \$2,000 a year on average to do these simple tasks, which takes away money that could be better spent on child care, health insurance and other basic needs, said Michelle Laymon, Family Economic Success program manager at Cope Family Center.

That may change thanks to Bank On Napa Valley, a new program that banks and nonprofit organizations in Napa County inaugurated Saturday at the Napa County Library.

The campaign is patterned after a nationwide initiative begun in 2006 to help immigrants and low-income families and individuals enter the financial mainstream.

“When you have families that are financially stable, it just leads to a more financially stable neighborhood, a more financially stable community. So it’s better economics all around,” said Lily Ruiz, vice president of corporate communications for Bank of the West.

The banks involved in Bank On Napa Valley — Bank of the West, Community Trust Bank, Umpqua Bank, Mechanics Bank, Bank of Napa and Rabobank — have agreed to offer various services at reduced or no cost.

They each offer slightly different deals, including no or very low monthly fees; no or low monthly minimum balances; low or no overdraft fees; and financial training classes. Some banks will also accept matricular consular identification cards and foreign passports as primary identification.

These offers are geared to low-income working families, Laymon said.

Bank representatives worked with nonprofit organizations, including Cope Family Center and Puertas Abiertas, an organization that helps immigrant families, to set up Bank On Napa Valley.

“We really wanted to create a partnership that helps people build wealth, (to) help them have the same opportunity that other people have,” Laymon said.

Bank On Napa Valley representatives will also work with other organizations to help people file their taxes for free.

The number of people who will be helped by the new banking program is anybody's guess, bank representatives said Saturday. But the program is not expected to be a moneymaker for the companies.

"For a bank to come to the table, it usually shows their real intentions to support the community," said Tracy Calkins, manager at Mechanics Bank in Napa, who began work on the project in November 2011.

"The community has helped us become successful for many, many years as a bank. So it's our way to turn around and give back to the community that's helped us become so successful," he said.

Among those who stopped by Saturday was Michael Cox, a construction worker who has been homeless for three months and is trying to get his life together.

Cox, who said he is homeless for the first time in his life, has worked temporary jobs, including the grape crush. He now works for a bottling company, yet remains unable to find an affordable apartment.

"I need to open a bank account because I need direct deposit for these companies I'm working," Cox said. He spends about \$4 to cash his check and make money orders every time he gets paid, he said.

He left the library Saturday with an appointment to get free help to file his taxes. He expects a refund.

"I've got to get my life back," he said. "This has been really humbling to me."

Learn more

- For more information on the Bank On Napa Valley program, visit [facebook.com/BankOnNV](https://www.facebook.com/BankOnNV); contact Michelle Laymon at Cope Family Center, 707-252-1123 ext. 110, or email mlaymon@copefamilycenter.org; or go to any of the participating banks in Napa County.
- To learn about tax clinics, dial 211 and provide your ZIP code.