

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## ECCO Celebrates 25 Years Serving the Community

Charleston, S.C. (September 17, 2014): After Hurricane Hugo, the only distribution center for food, water and clothing east of the Cooper River was at Christ Our King Stella Maris School hall. Out of that crisis East Cooper Community Outreach (ECCO) was born. Twenty-five years later, ECCO provides low-income residents with emergency assistance for food, clothing, household furnishings and financial needs as well as access to dental care, health care, prescription drug assistance, financial literacy, job readiness training, and counseling.

ECCO will celebrate 25 years of service with a free special event Sept. 20 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Awendaw Green.

Founded in 1989 by Monsignor James Carter of Christ Our King Catholic Church, ECCO was an emergency response that grew into a community mainstay. East of the Cooper River sustained some of the worst damage, including Mount Pleasant, Awendaw and McClellanville. “It looked like a third world country,” Monsignor Carter said. “People without houses; living in tents. It became apparent that even though Mount Pleasant was an affluent area, there were deep pockets of poverty. It was devastating.”

Over the last quarter century, ECCO has grown from an emergency relief distribution center to a reliable source of refuge for people in financial distress offering a wide range of services across three program areas: Basic Needs, Health Services, and Education and Job Services. For many years, the majority of ECCO’s client population came from generational poverty, but as a result of the last economic downturn, many more individuals and families have used the organization’s comprehensive services.

During the early 1990s, ECCO opened a Dental Clinic for emergency extractions, began providing financial assistance and counseling, and started the prescription drug program. In 2008, ECCO shifted its focus to guide clients towards self-sufficiency and achievement with added educational opportunities and programs like the Getting Ahead Family Partnership for single mothers. Last year, ECCO Works was launched to help clients get a job and keep it for one year, as a sustainable approach to reducing poverty, which incorporates job preparedness, case management, skills training, and employment placement assistance.

### **A community celebration**

The event will take place at Awendaw Green on September 20<sup>th</sup> from 11am-4pm. It will include live music, an array of food vendors, and activities for all ages such as face painting, a balloon artist, the Art Bus, a bounce house, Charleston County Parks and Recreation’s climbing wall, and a Sky Zone play station. Additional exhibits will offer Hurricane preparedness support, information about ECCO’s services, and educational games for prizes. There will also be a video testimonial booth for attendees to share their ECCO stories and memories. The first 350 guests to arrive will receive \$15 of tickets to use at the Kickin' Chicken, Roadside Seafood and Cast Iron Food Trucks, BBQ, oven fired pizza, Kona Ice, T & T Kettle Corn, and King of Pops. Entertainment will be provided by Shades of Plenty, Shem Creek Boogie Band, and the Plantation Singers. This event is made possible thanks to ECCO’s 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary sponsors: Christ Our King Catholic Church, Benefitfocus, TD Bank, Glasspro, Inc., Maverick Southern Kitchens, Mount Pleasant Waterworks, along with in-kind support from Adams Outdoor Advertising, the Children’s Center at Carolina Place, CMMC Security, Minuteman Press, and Sewee Outpost. TriCounty Link will be providing free transportation from McClellanville to the event.

### **East Cooper Community Outreach**

The mission of East Cooper Community Outreach (ECCO) is to provide safety net services to our low-income neighbors, while empowering them to create better lives for themselves, their families and their communities. More than 4,500 families a year receive emergency assistance for food, clothing, household furnishings and financial aid, and have access to dental care, health care, prescription assistance, financial literacy classes, job readiness training, and counseling. Visit ECCO’s website for more information: [www.ECCOcharleston.org](http://www.ECCOcharleston.org).

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