

Thursday, October 11, 2007

**CONSUMER AFFAIRS HITS THE STREET TO HELP STORE OWNERS
KNOW THE LAW AS PART OF ANNUAL BUSINESS EDUCATION DAY**

***Teams Target Approximately 1,000 Businesses in 13 Retail Areas Citywide,
Distributing Brochures & Answering Questions***

New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) Commissioner Jonathan Mintz today joined representatives from the Union Square Partnership to kick off the agency's 5th annual **BUSINESS EDUCATION DAY**—a comprehensive five borough event to help educate local businesses about the City's consumer protection and licensing laws. Throughout the day, dozens of DCA staff were joined by the Department of Small Business Services, community and business organizations, and elected officials in visiting approximately 1,000 businesses in 13 high-traffic retail areas Citywide. Teams met individually with managers and employees to answer questions and distribute copies of DCA's *Ten Things Every Business Should Know* pocket guide in English, Spanish, and Chinese. They also provided information on how employees can claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a federal, state and City tax credit that can return as much as \$6,000 to families earning less than \$39,000. The EITC is a critical anti-poverty initiative and key focus of DCA's Office of Financial Empowerment.

"Most businesses want to do the right thing by consumers—and we want to make sure they have the tools to do so," said Commissioner Mintz. "By going business-to-business and answering questions in person without issuing violations, we're sending a strong signal that the City is here to help them."

Neighborhoods visited as part of **BUSINESS EDUCATION DAY 2007** include Melrose, Parkchester/Castle Hill, and Fordham Road in the **Bronx**; Brownsville/East New York, Cobble Hill/Carroll Gardens/Park Slope, and Bedford Stuyvesant/Crown Heights in **Brooklyn**; Washington Heights and 14th Street, Union Square/Chelsea in **Manhattan**; Cambria Heights/St. Albans, Corona, Astoria, and Glendale/Ridgewood in **Queens**; and Forest Avenue and Port Richmond Avenue in **Staten Island**. DCA distributed information specifically about:

- **License Requirements**
- **Refund Policy Rules / Receipts and Price Posting**
- **Scales and Weighing Merchandise**
- **How to Help Employees Claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)**

"With support from City agencies including the Department of Consumer Affairs, the 14th Street-Union Square neighborhood has become one of New York's most vibrant and successful business districts," said Jennifer Falk, Executive Director of the Union Square Partnership. "By offering best practice tips to our area merchants, we educate and empower them with the tools they need to help their businesses to thrive and grow."

Routine inspections conducted Citywide over the past year show business compliance with Consumer Protection Laws (specifically refunds and receipts) has increased to a

high of 93%, and specific licensing requirements are now at an 87% compliance rate, up from 82% last year. In fiscal year 2007, while DCA helped New Yorkers with more than 160,000 requests for information, it also successfully resolved approximately 7,300 consumer complaints and secured more than \$5.3 million in consumer restitution.

Copies of all free brochures, including DCA's *Ten Things Every Business Should Know* pocket guide in English, Spanish, and Chinese, and EITC materials in 11 languages, are available by calling 311 or going online at www.nyc.gov/consumers.

DCA's enforcement squads operate from borough offices located in Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn/Staten Island, and the Bronx, allowing staff to work closely with Community Boards and other City agencies to coordinate efforts and respond to complaints quickly. DCA inspectors are cross-trained in a number of areas, including routine testing of scales, consumer protection violations, license checks, and more. Cross-training inspectors has allowed for more comprehensive inspections at each location, resulting in the elimination of multiple visits to businesses.

DCA enforces the Consumer Protection Law and other related business laws throughout New York City. Ensuring a vibrant marketplace where consumers and businesses can benefit, DCA licenses more than 60,000 businesses in 55 different categories. Through targeted outreach, partnerships with community and trade organizations, and other informational materials, DCA educates consumers and businesses alike about their rights and responsibilities. For more information, call 311 or visit DCA online at www.nyc.gov/consumers.