June 24, 2026
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MEDIA RELEASE

Over $28 Million in Debt Paid Off Through VyStar's Debt Payoff Challenge

A VyStar initiative designed to close the gap between how debt feels and what it actually costs families

JACKSONVILLE, FL – More than 40,000 participants achieved a major financial milestone, reducing over $28 million in debt through the VyStar Debt Payoff Challenge, a Financial Fitness initiative designed to help people take control of rising debt and reduce financial stress.

The 3-month challenge combined simple tools, practical education, and ongoing support to help participants build momentum and make measurable progress. Participants began with a Financial Fitness assessment and received guidance and resources, along with access to solutions such as refinancing and debt consolidation.

The Debt Payoff Challenge was inspired by findings from *The State of Financial Stability in the Southeast, presented by VyStar and TransUnion*, which revealed a growing disconnect in how people experienced debt.

The Southeast Region specific research showed that:

- 40% of residents said finances were their top source of stress.
- Only 19% qualified as financially healthy, compared with 31% nationally.
- Yet 62% still described their debt as manageable.

VyStar identified a gap between how people experience debt day to day and what the numbers show. Many households believed they were managing their debt, even as financial strain showed up in missed payments, growing balances, and ongoing stress.

"Too often, debt feels manageable until the stress shows up somewhere else, like an unexpected car repair or a medical bill," said Dana Karzan, Chief Marketing Officer, VyStar Credit Union. "That's when households realize their debt is unmanageable. Unmanageable debt builds overtime, often in ways that are easy to miss. We designed the Debt Payoff Challenge to give people a clearer view of their finances and practical, judgment free support so they could act earlier and move forward with confidence and stability."

The initiative also drove a strong sense of community, with more than 3,400 participants in a VyStar Facebook group to share progress, strategies, and encouragement throughout the challenge. VyStar also expanded the program through events across Jacksonville, Orlando, and Atlanta to connect directly with local communities.

The Debt Payoff Challenge received national recognition, with highlights at the 2026 Financial Brand Conference and the Financial Health Network's EMERGE 2026 Conference in partnership with the City of Atlanta and United Way. It's being recognized as a scalable way for financial institutions to partner with city officials and non-profits to help people reduce debt and build financial confidence.

At the conclusion of the challenge, five participants were randomly selected to receive $5,000 each totaling $25,000 to support their continued debt payoff journey. "It was so exciting. I still can't believe it," said Orlando area winner Brandi Wilson. "Winning the $5,000 feels like such a huge boost and just reinforces that all the hard work is paying off. I'm putting it straight into my savings to get closer to buying a home, which makes that goal feel even more real and within reach."

The VyStar Debt Payoff Challenge reflects VyStar's continued focus on helping members take practical steps toward stronger financial stability.

For more information about VyStar's financial tools and resources and to read *The State of Financial Stability in the Southeast*, *presented by VyStar and TransUnion* go to vystarcu.org.

About VyStar Credit Union

VyStar Credit Union is the second-largest credit union headquartered in Florida, with 79 full-service branches across Florida and Georgia, more than 1 million members and assets of over $14 billion. VyStar is a major employer in the region with over 2,300 employees across the communities it serves. VyStar membership is open to everyone who lives or works in the 49 contiguous counties of Central to North Florida, 29 Georgia counties, as well as past and present military members and their families all over the world. Members benefit from convenient access to over 55,000 surcharge free ATMs worldwide. VyStar has earned national recognition from Time Magazine, Fortune, USA Today and Forbes for excellence in financial services, innovation, and customer service, reflecting its commitment to delivering value and exceptional experiences to members. For more information, visit vystarcu.org, and follow us on Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), and LinkedIn.