



The Balance Sheet

The Balance Sheet Quarterly Newsletter is produced by
Cornell Cooperative Extension's Family Economics and Resource
Management Program Work Team

Spring 2017

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Spring is a time to refresh, rejuvenate and reconnect with what's important to you and your family. It's also a time to reassess where you stand with certain financial goals and efforts that will aid you in securing a sense of financial security and purpose as you engage in your busy day-to-day work. We hope the articles contained in this issue help you achieve that sense of accomplishment and encourage you to tidy up your financial affairs so you can enjoy other springtime activities like baseball, cleaning, and gardening!

**Happy Reading —
Theresa Mayhew, Editor**

Team members include Barbara Henza, Cortland County; Nancy Reigelsperger, Steuben County; Linda Law-Saunders, Washington County; Maria DeLucia-Evans, Albany County; Theresa Mayhew, Columbia & Greene Counties; Valle Castner, Yates County; Kenneth McLaurin, Jr., Tompkins County; Sean Welsh, Sullivan County; Jackie Spencer, Tioga County; Rochelle Runge, Jefferson County; Tom Hirschl, Cornell University; and community member Ann Gifford, Tompkins County.

Emergency Preparedness: Is Your Financial Grab 'N Go Kit Ready?

Maria DeLucia-Evans, CCE Albany County



Preparing in advance for an emergency doesn't just include readying a basic emergency supply kit. While this is important, we don't want to overlook the need for families to collect and organize critical financial, medical, and household contact information. Often after an immediate emergency this information becomes crucial in the recovery process. If we haven't secured everything prior to the emergency the information can become difficult to obtain.

First, you want to make sure that you have recorded important personal information for your household. You want to ensure that you can prove the identity of all household members, have contact information for all family members, and contact information for your employer and the employers of others in your household. A complete checklist for all important documents (birth certificates, drivers' licenses, etc.) can be found at www.ready.gov.

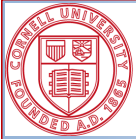
Next, you need to have records on any important financial and legal accounts. These may include, housing payments, other financial obligations such as utility bills or credit/debt accounts, financial accounts like checking, savings, or retirement accounts, insurance policies, sources of income, tax statements and estate planning. These documents are necessary if you need to re-establish financial accounts, provide contact information, or maintain payments and credit. Again, visit www.ready.gov for a complete checklist to ensure you have everything you need.

Also collect any pertinent medical information relating to the health and medical needs of your household. This may include medication lists, physician contact information, copies of health insurance cards and pharmacy cards.

If you do not have the original version of a document you need, contact the appropriate company or agency to obtain it. Take photographs or video inside your home to record items and any valuable belongings. Keep some cash in the same safe location in case ATMs are not functioning after an emergency.

Make sure to review all of your information periodically so it is current and adequate. You will want to store all of your documents in a fireproof and waterproof box or safe. Any electronic documents should be stored on a password-protected flash drive or external hard drive in this same fireproof/waterproof container.

If you need to vacate your home after an emergency you can grab your box and have peace of mind that all your personal, financial, and medical records have been previously secured and are all accessible as needed.



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Upcoming Classes:

Parent Education Programs:

Parents Apart

June 1 and 8, 6 to 9 pm

July 22, 9 am to 4 pm

September 14 and 21, 6 to 9pm

Financial Education:

Family Budget Education

Program— by appointment

Please note: the information in this newsletter is for educational purposes only. References to specific products or services do not imply endorsement by CCE.

National Observances for April, May and June

Theresa Mayhew, CCE Columbia & Greene Counties & Barb Henza, CCE Cortland County

Here's a list of upcoming national observances – days, weeks and months – for consumer related topics that may be of interest to you and your family, friends and neighbors. You may have heard of many of these but some may not be that familiar. Observance sponsors and website links are provided to help you learn more about each one, especially those lesser known designations.



APRIL

National Fair Housing Month – (U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development) https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/topics/housing_discrimination

National Financial Literacy Month — Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation <https://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/information/literacy.html>

National Healthcare Decisions Week – April 16 – 22 (The Conservation Project in collaboration with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement) <http://www.nhdd.org/#nhdd-2017-agenda>

Earth Day/International Mother Earth Day – April 22 (Earth Day Network; United Nations) <http://www.earthday.org/> and <http://www.un.org/en/events/motherearthday/>

Money Smart Week – April 22 - 29 (Money Smart Advisory Council) <http://www.moneysmartweek.org/>

MAY

Older American Month – (Administration for Community Living) <https://oam.acl.gov/>

Air Quality Awareness Week – May 1 – 5 (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) <https://www3.epa.gov/airnow/airaware/>

Choose Privacy Week – May 1-7 (American Library Association) <https://chooseprivacyweek.org/>

National Drinking Water Week – May 7-13 (American Waterworks Association) <https://www.awwa.org/resources-tools/public-affairs/public-affairs-events/drinking-water-week.aspx>

JUNE

National Safety Month – June (National Safety Council) <http://www.nsc.org/act/events/Pages/national-safety-month.aspx> (National Safety Council)

World Environment Day – June 5 (United Nations) <http://www.worldenvironmentday.global/>

World Elder Abuse Day – June 15 (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services) <https://acl.gov/newsroom/observances/WEAAD/Events/Event-Lookup.aspx>

Successful Secondhand Shopping

Theresa Mayhew, CCE Columbia & Greene Counties

If you've never shopped at a consignment shop or thrift store, this is a good time to start. Folks will be spring cleaning and taking their no longer needed or wanted goods to these types of establishments either to sell for cash or donate outright for a possible tax deduction.

There is a difference. Thrift stores take donations to sell outright for profit while consignment shops sell items belonging to other people and split the profits with the consignor. Consignment shops usually have rigorous requirements for items they will take – brand new (tags on), excellent condition or gently used – are most common. If you're stopping in a consignment shop for the first time ask to get a copy of their sales agreement that explains their store policies regarding how long they keep an item, when you can pick up unsold items, profit percentages and the like.

The good news is that there are usually a good number of consignment and thrift shops in your area. Check the yellow pages, internet listings and community newspapers for locations, types and other pertinent information. Many times both consignment shops and thrift stores have sales or specials going, just like regular retail businesses. They usually have fitting rooms so you can try items on. One of my favorite consignment shops has regular sales ranging from 20 to 70% off depending on sales inventory and time of year. I recently scooped up a designer jacket that would normally retail for \$80 for just twelve bucks.

If going to a physical store isn't for you try selling unwanted clothing on line. Craigslist.com is one option. Two that I've learned about recently but haven't tried are threadup.com and swapstyle.com. Learn more by visiting their websites.

Of course, if you wait a few more weeks, garage, yard and tag sale season will be in full bloom. There's always bargains to be found at these events. It just takes time, patience and loving the thrill of finding a deal on an article of clothing that you or a family member can use and appreciate at a fraction of its original price!

Having the "Talk" With Older Family Members

Barb Henza, CCE Cortland County

Sooner or later many of us will face the prospect of having to discuss finances with older family members, whether it's our parents or another elderly family member. The topic of finances is a delicate one for most people and should be approached with tact and sensitivity. It's also a conversation that ideally should begin before there is an emergency.

Consider a non-threatening approach. Mention the steps you have taken to set up your financial plans and go over anything that may involve them. Keep the tone of any conversation you have with older family members respectful and non-judgmental even if they are resistant to talking about their finances. Present the discussion as a way to help them identify ways you can make their lives easier. If the topic seems overwhelming, focus on one thing at a time, such as where important documents are kept. If they absolutely refuse to talk with you, let them know you are available to help them when they need it.

Start by making a list of the financial information you will need to pull together to assist your family members. Know where to find important documents such as wills, marriage and birth certificates, military records, titles to property, insurance policies, a living will, financial account information, mortgages and other debts and tax returns. Find out the location and contents of any safe deposit boxes they may have (along with who has the keys) as well as the combination to a home safe if there is one.

Make a list of contact information (phone and email) of their attorney, accountant, financial advisor and insurance agent. Locate Medicare, Medicaid and any supplemental insurance policy information. Make a contact list of doctors they are seeing as well as any medications they are currently taking along with the pharmacy they use to have them filled. Many medical providers are moving to an online portal where patients can review test results, order prescription refills and set up appointments. Check to see if they have done so or offer to assist them with setting one up.

If they are open to it, talk over their expenses and work on a strategy for meeting all their living and medical expenses should something happen. Also discuss care-giving options. What is their preference if they can no longer manage living where they are now? Would they be able to age in place with some assistance or would they be open to moving to a retirement community or assisted living facility? Do they have long-term care insurance that would help with the cost of having a home care aide?

The "talk" may not be the easiest one you will ever have but the long term benefits will be invaluable for all involved.

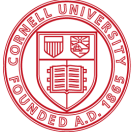
BOOK CORNER

How to Care for Your Parents' Money While Caring for Your Parents

by Sharon Burns, PhD, CPA, and Raymond Forge, PhD

This book was published in 2003 but it does a great job of laying out the basics of how adult children can approach and tackle this sometimes overwhelming topic. It looks at basic money management, protecting and investing; consuming; transferring estates; and using the lessons you learned. A good primer if you need a tool to help you get organized and on track. Check your local library to see if they have a copy and what other resources are available. There are many online resources, as well.





An Emergency Fund—The Building Block of Financial Success

Nancy Reigelsperger, CCE Steuben County



There is nothing that can derail your financial progress faster than an emergency. You think you're doing okay, making headway towards your goals, and boom! The refrigerator stops working, your car breaks down, your dog needs veterinary care and suddenly you're right back in crisis mode.

Personal finance experts all seem to agree that an emergency fund is an essential component of a good financial plan. After all, none of us have a crystal ball. We know in life "things happen", things break down or wear out, people get sick or lose jobs. Having an emergency fund can lessen the impact on our budgets when "things happen"

The purpose of an emergency fund is to enable a person to get through financial emergencies without incurring debt. Typically experts are of the opinion that when building an emergency fund, one should aim for an amount that would cover six to twelve months of living expenses. This amount would help to maintain financial stability during a job loss, estimating it could take up to six months to find a replacement job. Other experts suggest making a goal of \$1,000 in emergency savings.

While \$1000 may feel daunting at first, the truth is that there are plenty of ways to build an emergency fund quickly. **The key to success is being willing to accept the idea that getting your finances in order might not be fun or easy, but it will be worth the effort!**

Start looking around your home for those things that you no longer need or use and sell them on Craig's list or host a yard sale. Don't hang on to things because you are afraid you won't get what you paid—you won't. Cut down on your grocery bill by checking sale ads, eating less meat, and plan meals and shop with a list. Cutting back or out on eating out. Restaurant meals can be expensive and add up when you total in drinks and tips. Analyze your spending. Start a cash tracker and keep track of your daily discretionary spending to determine if you have areas that could be cut out and the money directed to your emergency fund. Direct your tax refund into an emergency fund instead of spending it on discretionary purchases.

It's also important to determine what constitutes an "emergency" when you want to withdraw money from your account. It's important to determine if it's a need or a want. Does the "emergency" bear financial or other severe consequences if you don't spend your money now? If not spending a dollar now will cost many dollars later, it could classify as an emergency.

While building an emergency fund might feel difficult or even impossible at first, it doesn't have to be. Make an emergency fund your goal for your family's security and take steps to reach that goal. Remember— even little bits add up.