

LifeLines

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information for your life

RESETTING YOUR RECESSION-ERA BUDGET?
There May Be Money In Places You Haven't Checked

FIREWORKS SAFETY

WEB TIPS FOR SMOOTHER AIRLINE TRAVEL

SUMMER BREAK FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS

Your source for information: published quarterly; referenced daily



Resetting Your Recession-Era Budget?

There May Be Money in Places You Haven't Checked

Despite small glimmers of light in an otherwise worrisome economic picture, Americans are still losing their jobs and companies are still cutting back. So if you're looking for ideas to raise cash during these tough times, here are a range of things you should try and a few things you should avoid.



START WITH A FAMILY MEETING: Sometimes the best money strategies come from coming clean. A family meeting, where everyone identifies areas where they can save a little is a good first step to finding more solutions. Here's the point. If you want to find cash, the best place to start is by cutting things you and other members of the family don't need. Admitting those things is the first step to saving money.

FIND ADDITIONAL INCOME: If you can add hours at work or find a second job, do it. Obviously check with a tax professional or a Certified Financial Planner to find out if this additional income might put you in a higher tax bracket and therefore defeat the purpose of gathering that income. In most cases, bringing in more cash is a better way to solve a funding problem than liquidating assets.

FIND ALTERNATE TRANSPORTATION: Take the train, carpool, or if you can, get rid of a car you really don't need. Once you count up your expenses for gasoline, insurance and maintenance expenses, you'll definitely find a significant pile of cash. And if you decide to keep your car, you should definitely rebid your auto insurance to get a lower rate or to decide whether to drop collision coverage on a paid-off set of wheels.



TAP YOUR EMERGENCY FUND: Note that we put this item a few notches down because you should always find ways to preserve an emergency fund if you can. As a reminder, every individual or family should have an emergency fund that contains enough money to cover 3-6 months of living expenses. Oh, and if you don't have an emergency fund and you don't have to pay off debt, it might be wise to redirect the dollars you save into building one.

SELL TAXABLE INVESTMENTS – IF THEY'RE STILL AT A LOSS: Again, this is a good reason to consult your tax or financial adviser first, but selling some losing investments might be a good

way to raise cash in a hurry. Note that we're not talking about IRAs or any other tax-advantaged accounts. But taxable investments sold at a loss – if they're investments you feel you can live without in the future – might kill two birds with one stone, making your bank account and tax picture healthier.

ASK A FAMILY MEMBER OR A FRIEND FOR A GIFT: If you don't feel it will damage your relationship, it might be worth asking if friends or family can offer up to \$13,000, which is the annual tax-exempt gifting limit in 2009. Remember that a friend or relative may give an unlimited amount if they write the check directly to a school or hospital, but they should check with their tax advisor and those institutions for the proper way to transfer those funds.

CRACK OPEN A CD: You might want to cash in a CD before it's due only if the penalty or lost interest doesn't make a difference to you. Depending on the CD's term, you might end up giving up all the interest you've earned if you've held it only a short time but getting cash in hand might be worth considerably more to you.

BORROW AGAINST A WHOLE LIFE POLICY: If there's cash value on a whole life policy you can borrow against, check it out. The rate will be low and the money's fairly quick – just don't liquidate the policy without checking.

Ideas you should avoid:

WITHDRAWING FUNDS FROM YOUR IRA: If you're under 59 ½, you're going to have to pay a 10 percent penalty and you lose savings momentum. And no, you can't borrow from an IRA – you can only withdraw and pay penalties.

CREDIT CARD CASH ADVANCES AND CONVENIENCE CHECKS: Despite tantalizing zero-percent offers, you'll be paying hefty fees to borrow – anywhere from 2 to 5 percent of the check amount – in addition to the interest you'll be charged until you pay off the balance.

PAYDAY LOANS: The interest rates on payday loans can start at 30 percent and eventually gather fees that can lead to a triple-interest-rate cost for a simple loan of a few hundred dollars.





Fireworks Safety

Independence Day, the celebration of the birth of our great nation, is just around the corner. As Americans prepare for Fourth-of-July festivities, they plan parties, backyard barbeques, and buy fireworks. Sometime in mid-June, fireworks displays start popping up all over the country; their shelves quickly emptying as people buy quantities of fireworks in anticipation of the holiday.

Americans love fireworks! They are dazzling and exciting, but they can also be dangerous if used improperly. Fortunately, because of stringent Federal standards, legal fireworks are safer than ever, but they should still be handled with care.

If you plan to purchase fireworks to celebrate Independence Day, carefully inspect the packages to be sure you only purchase legal fireworks designed for consumer use. Learn to differentiate between legal consumer fireworks and dangerous explosive devices. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) requires that legal fireworks show the name of the item, the name of the manufacturer or distributor and easy-to-read cautionary labeling, and instructions for proper use. Currently, 32 states, plus the District of Columbia, allow the use of some or all types of consumer fireworks.

Legal consumer fireworks include fountains, cones, and sparklers. Items such as M-80s, M-100s, quarter-pounders, and blockbusters may be presented for sale as fireworks, but they are actually Federally banned explosives. They can cause serious injury and even death. Do not purchase anything that is not clearly labeled in accordance with the CPSC standards.

To ensure safe use of fireworks this summer, keep these tips in mind:

- Fireworks burn at approximately the same temperature as a household match and can cause burn injuries and ignite clothing if not used properly.
- NEVER give fireworks to young children. Even sparklers can be unsafe in the hands of a child.
- Check with your local police department to determine whether discharging fireworks is legal in your area.
- Inspect fireworks before you purchase and avoid unlabeled fireworks. If you become aware of anyone selling such devices, report it to your local police department.
- Homemade fireworks are deadly. Mixing and loading chemical powders is very dangerous and can seriously injure or even kill. Do not purchase or use any kits for making fireworks.



Safety Tips for Public Fireworks Displays

One safe way to enjoy the beauty of fireworks is to attend a public fireworks display presented by trained pyrotechnic experts. These professionals know and comply with all state and local regulations.

To stay safe while viewing firework displays, keep these tips in mind:

- Respect all safety barriers and resist any temptation to get close to the actual firing site. The best view of fireworks is from a quarter of a mile or more away.
- It is possible that fireworks might fall to the ground without exploding. If you happen to find any unexploded fireworks, do NOT touch them and immediately notify the local fire or police department.
- Pets have very sensitive ears and the booms and bangs associated with a fireworks display can be uncomfortable, particularly to dogs. Leave pets at home if you are going to a fireworks show.
- When attending a public display, leave your own fireworks at home. Even sparklers can be dangerous in a large crowd.



U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission fireworks safety website <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpsc/pub/pubs/july4/4thjuly.html>

Information from The National Council on Fireworks Safety, <http://www.fireworksafety.com/>

Web Tips for Smoother Airline Travel

By Irene E. McDermott



“Beware the myth of easy travel,” a friend once cautioned. His warning seems increasingly apt as security measures put in place after 9/11 and airline cutbacks have made traveling by air an oddly hostile experience, more of an ordeal than an adventure.

Just as it helped us to find the cheapest air fares, the Internet can also deliver the data we need to reach our destination without disaster. Many travel web sites also work on web-enabled mobile phones or can deliver text messages. That’s a great advantage for the traveler on the go who can’t always get to a computer to connect to the Internet.

To avoid becoming a victim of the chaos of unregulated airlines and outdated air traffic control equipment, it helps to be informed about the current state of affairs: on the ground, in the air, on the plane. FlightStats (<http://www.flightstats.com>) is a comprehensive website that dishes up all sorts of handy real-time flight information and delivers it in a variety of ways: on the site, through an RSS feed, and via cell phone—all for free. Search between destinations to see what flights are offered and if they have any available seats. No ticket price data here, but you will get historical on-time flight ratings.

FlightStats offers general airport delay information, airport maps with weather radar overlays, and real-time Google traffic infor-

mation. Its flight tracker matches flights to gates and even lets you know when a plane has pushed away from its gate but has not yet taken off. If you forget to check FlightStats on your home computer, pick it up on your web-enabled cell phone at the terminal: <http://mobile.flightstats.com>.

Now you know about the airport, but what about the plane? SeatGuru (<http://www.seatguru.com>) will reveal the pros and cons of your assigned chair, even telling you if it offers a plug for your laptop. To research on the run, type this URL into your web-enabled phone browser or PDA: <http://mobile.seatguru.com>.

Of course, the state of your seat won’t matter if you can’t get through airport security. Visit TSA: For Travelers (<http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/index.shtml>) for tips to speed you through. Find out how much shampoo you can bring aboard, understand why you can’t bring your snow globe in your carry-on, and learn procedures for bringing along prescription medicines. Find average security checkpoint wait times for airports here: <http://waittime.tsa.dhs.gov/index.html>.

Smoother Airline Travel (continued)



How long will it take you to get back into your own country when returning from abroad? Check U.S. Customs and Border Protection Wait Times (http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/wait_times/) to discover average queue lengths at northern and southern border crossings and at customs inspection points at major U.S. airports.

Now you are totally prepared. You know your airports, your airline, and you have printed out your ticket. Unfortunately, that ticket does not guarantee the flight.

To save money, airlines have been cancelling flights like crazy and sometimes they don't notify passengers ahead of time. What steps can you take to make sure that you don't get a nasty surprise at the airport?

Travel writer Chris Elliott (<http://www.elliott.org>) says that the best way to avoid this plight is to book through a reliable travel agent. These professionals are savvy to the state of specific airlines and know which ones are cutting back. If you are a "do-it-yourselfer," Elliot suggests enrolling in your airline's email alert system—and make sure that the messages don't go into the spam filter. Also, check historical flight information on FlightStats (<http://www.flightstats.com>) to see whether this particular flight is often cancelled or if the airport often experiences delays.

Finally, check your reservations at least two weeks in advance, before you have to pay the inflated "walk up" fare for a replacement. If you read the news and sense that your flight may be cancelled, proactively call the airline: Airline Contact Information (<http://airlinecontact.info>).

Seems like a lot of work for something that you assume to be settled once you handed over your credit card. Still, in this tight transportation environment, it is better to be safe than to spend half of your vacation at the airport Cinnabon instead of Hawaii.





Summer Break For Family Caregivers

Whether it is a day trip to the beach or that vacation you have always dreamed of, summer is a time when most of us make plans to get away. We all need a break from work or other responsibilities to relax and reconnect with friends and family. But for those providing care for an aging family member, fun summer plans may seem completely out of reach.

Approximately one in four Americans is providing some form of care for an aging adult. This can range from running errands and paying bills, to administering medications or daily grooming. Many of the caregivers are providing this care in addition to caring for their own children or working outside the home. A day off, much less a week or two of vacation, seems like an impossible feat.

This may be due to lack of finances, or the idea that “no one can take care of Mom like I can.” No matter what the reason, caregivers sometimes have a hard time remembering that they need to take care of themselves as well. Caregiver stress can have a negative impact on well-being and health. Caregivers have higher rates of depression—some studies even suggest that

they have higher incidences of heart disease and diabetes.

Respite care can provide what is desperately needed by caregivers: a vacation from the daily care giving routine. And it’s not just the caregivers who benefit. Studies have shown that caregivers who take advantage of respite care are more likely to keep their loved ones at home, and not in facilities, for longer periods of time.

What is respite care?

Respite care is simply providing a way for regular caregivers to receive some “time off” from their care giving routine. A few hours, a day, or a week of respite can help to alleviate stress of family caregivers and give them a chance to recharge the batteries.

There are a variety of options for respite care:



Family and friends—many caregivers rely on other family members to give them a break from regular care giving. A sibling or other relative living close by can come over for the day and take on care giving duties. An out of town relative can fly in for a week so you can take that much needed vacation. The key to family assistance is regular family meetings and care planning for the aging parent. Friends, neighbors and church groups are also good sources of support. If a friend offers, it is important to take them up on that support. Likewise, when offering to help, friends and neighbors should be specific about what they are willing to do. “I can come over and spend Saturday afternoon so you can go to the movies or just spend some time by yourself.” This is of course the most cost effective way to get the respite care you need.

In-Home Care—in virtually every community, there is an in-home care agency that can send a worker into the home. All levels of care are available, from cleaning and meal preparation, to more hands-on care. Costs vary, and

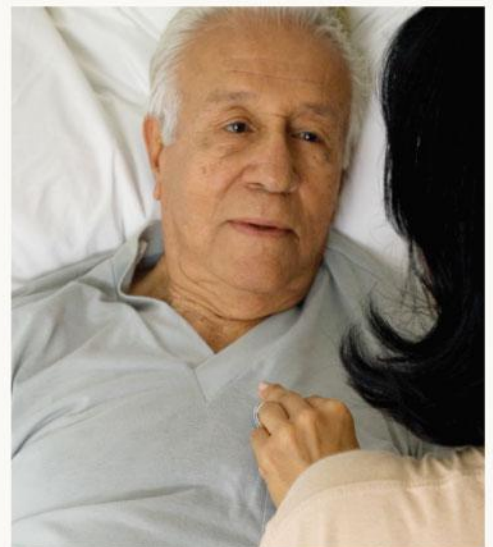
some services may be covered by medical insurance, Medicare or Medicaid. Contact your local office or your work-life provider if you need more information. You may prefer to find these workers on your own or through referrals from friends or others in your community. Before you allow a worker in your home, it is imperative that you do a background check and check references.

Adult Day Care Centers—Adult day care centers provide health and therapeutic services, Monday through Friday, during daytime hours. They also allow for social interaction for frail adults and those suffering from Alzheimer’s or other dementia. Some community-sponsored programs are subsidized by public funds to help defray costs. Some have sliding scale fees based on ability. Medicare does not cover the cost of adult day care but Medicaid sometimes will.

Residential Programs—Group homes, hospitals, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities will sometimes offer temporary care based on availability. Although medical insurance generally does not cover overnight respite, long-term care policies and veterans programs may subsidize care.

Caregiver retreats and respite camps are also available in some areas. This affords an opportunity for caregivers to get together and share experiences and get away from care giving duties.

To find respite care in your area, an employee assistance counselor or work-life specialist can help. Check with your company’s human resources department. You can also contact your local caregiver support group. They are a great source of information and support to get you out there to enjoy your summer.





Living room

Resource and Referral

For help when you need it, count on your EAP for free, confidential support any time, any day. Contact the consultants by phone, or log onto the website. Resources and referrals are available for matters related to work, family, relationships, caregiving, health, or any kind of support for your well-being—helping make *life less complicated!*

For assistance any time, call 800-873-7138, or log onto www.minesandassociates.com.

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