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Did You Know...?

News you can use for your financial well-being

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Summer Travel on A Budget

With gas over \$4.50 per gallon, and airlines charging for everything possible in an effort to stay solvent, this is shaping up to be the "Bummer Summer" for many families. Rarely do the lines of financial planning and travel planning intersect, but given the escalating cost of taking the family on the road, I thought I'd share a few ideas on how to enjoy summer without breaking the bank.

Get last-minute deals

The Web is a wonderful place to shop for bargains, and I've had a lot of luck using Expedia (www.expedia.com) to find hotel and flight deals. Hotwire is another resource I've heard good things about (www.hotwire.com). There are also great trip-planning tools on each site, and also on Yahoo Travel (www.travel.yahoo.com).

Rent a vacation home

Whether at Lake Tahoe, the Coast, or anywhere in the US, renting a house can be much cheaper than staying in a hotel for a week. You can save money by not having to eat every meal out, and have many of the comforts of home. Check out Vacation-Rentals-By-Owner (www.vrbo.com) for a huge inventory of homes for rent across the country. If you have other families you like to travel with, renting a large home and sharing costs among 2-3 families can be even better savings. For a number of years, we've rented a home on the West Shore of Tahoe for a week in the summer—it's a great vacation!

Take advantage of the beauty of Northern California

We live in one of the most beautiful places on Earth, why go anywhere else? Hikes and picnics in the many parks in the area, bike rides (check out www.bikealameda.org for ideas), fishing in local reservoirs, the opportunities are endless and right in your backyard.

Surviving the Dog Days of Summer

By Harry Hartman, Hartman Insurance Services

As our weather continues to get warmer as summer is upon us, it looks like everything else in our world is also going up. Prices for gasoline, food, utilities, transportation and most other things are going up to make the basic cost of living more expensive. It's at time like these we should take active steps to keep as many of these costs down to get through this challenging economy of ours.

We all hope the overall market stays strong and we want the US dollar to strengthen during the summer to help those gas prices stabilize. We may not be able to do much to influence those factors very much, but we can make decisions closer to home or work. Driving less, carpooling and taking public transportation are obvious solutions, but walking or cycling during this nice weather has other positive benefits if we can do that. Look at other things in your life to cut back on, save money or just cancel outright. Most times you won't miss it. We have to conserve water in the East Bay now and cutting back on all utilities if possible will save money along the way.

We also know that all health insurance rates continue to go up and one way to save money for both group and individual plans is to select a higher deductible type of plan to drive those premiums down. All carriers are now offering a broad range of H S A (Health Savings Accounts) and High Deductible-eligible plans. During the summer months we also want to stay healthy to keep those medical costs down. Nobody wants to visit the clinic or hospital while we are trying to enjoy ourselves. Since we all tend to get more active during the summer, we need to make sure we pay attention to avoid things that could get us into trouble. Many people are injured during these warmer months because of increased activity and taking chances.

Whether you are at home, working in your yard or on the house, on a local outing or on vacation somewhere, it pays to be careful and stay away from those injuries. Basic stretching exercises before you try those challenging activities like hiking, swimming, water skiing, painting or home improvement projects help avoid painful back or shoulder injuries. Missing work because of an injury or disability is not fun for anyone.

One more advisory is to work on your disaster kit for you and your family. As a long-time Red Cross volunteer, I urge you to update your preparedness plan and disaster supplies because we never know when that big earthquake might hit the Bay Area again.

Have a great summer and take care!

Harry Hartman is the owner of Hartman Insurance Services, specializing in insurance planning for individuals, families and businesses. He can be reached at (510) 814-0572.

Success Stories

Summer Travel on A Budget

My son Ryan is now 9, and school just ended for the year. A whole two months without homework, tests, reading assignments! Just fun and games—or so he thinks...

Now that the kids have more free time, their little minds will dream up all kinds of ways to empty your wallet: trips to the amusement park, movies, new toys to keep them entertained, etc. It's the perfect time to teach your kids about money.

First, capitalize on the idea that the further your money is from you, the harder it is to spend by setting up a bank account for your child. Take most of their cash savings and march them down to the bank, show them how this works, and explain to them concepts like interest on their deposits. When their first statement arrives, sit them down and make a fuss about how to read it. Try to instill the notion that saving money can give as much pleasure as spending it.

Next, make them contribute towards purchasing things they want this summer. For example, if they want to go to the amusement park, explain to them how much a ticket costs and tell them you'll split the cost 50/50 with them. Then devise ways for them to earn their portion of the ticket price—moving the lawn, washing the car, etc. Make them “have a little skin in the game”.

Finally, have your child plan a family trip. It can be something simple, an overnight to somewhere nearby for example. Give them a budget, and let them figure out how to use the money to provide for lodging, food, and entertainment.

Remember, statistics show that over 90% of college sophomores have a credit card! If you don't teach your kids about money, Visa and MasterCard will...

Timely Tidbits:

With the recent volatility in the investment markets, it's only natural to be concerned about the impact on your financial plan. Take advantage of extra time during the summer to schedule a plan review – call our office today!

Quote of the month: “Last night I stayed up late playing poker with Tarot cards. I got a full house and four people died.” Steven Wright, *US comedian and actor (1955 -)*

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