



DOLLARS and \$ENSE

Personal finance newsletter 1Q 2016



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New and Improved Website

We have a new website – same address, but more user-friendly, including mobile compatible, and it's easier to request online for an appointment. Check it out at www.CCOAcares.com. Also, be sure to like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter. We don't over-post and we provide timely financial tips you will find helpful.

Set Financial Goals for 2016



Many people dream of financial success. However, it's those who create a plan and take action who will achieve success. As a

new year begins, it is the perfect time to start brainstorming on your goals.

Create a few specific financial goals for 2016. Maybe you'd like to create a \$1,000 emergency fund by June 1st, or plan for a vacation you'd like to take. Don't just dream it – take action!

Write down your goals on a sticky note or index card and post it as a constant motivational reminder. People who write down their goals achieve them much more often than those who don't.

Create a budget. If you already have one, be sure to review and update it. Track your expenses first so you know where your money is really going. Otherwise, your numbers are just crude estimates and your budget won't work well, if at all.

Following these steps can make for a successful 2016!

Did you know? Owing half of your credit limit (such as \$1,000 on a \$2,000 credit card limit) is a credit score killer? The less you owe, the higher your score.



The IRS says last year's average refund was \$3,034. Are you expecting a big refund this year? If so, be sure to have a plan for what you will do with that money. All too often, we have seen people get a large refund but spend it all within a few months

and not improve their financial situation much at all. A few tips:

- Create a simple, quick plan on a small sheet of paper or your computer. Nothing major or time-consuming – just plan what you should do with that money so you will be the most productive with it.
- Put your needs ahead of your wants. You may want to take a \$2,000 family vacation, but if you need to get caught up on bills or create or increase your emergency savings, then that should take priority.
- It's okay to have some fun, just don't overdo it. But focus on paying down debt and increasing savings.

Emergency Fund

Do you have an emergency saving fund? Emergencies are a fact of life, so it isn't a question of whether you will have one at some point or not, but whether or not you are prepared

for it. Nearly 60% of adults ages 18-44 have less than \$500 saved for emergencies. Being financially prepared will help you better weather life's little storms. You can create your emergency fund – or boost a current one – with your tax refund.



Counselor Wins National Award



CCOA's Director of Counseling, Bridget Jeffries, won the national award for Outstanding Counselor of the Year by the National Foundation for Credit Counseling (NFCC)! We are very proud of Bridget, her outstanding service and her heart for helping others.

Congratulations to Bridget on completing the extensive education requirements and passing a comprehensive test to become one of the country's first NFCC Certified Student Loan Counselors. You will

be hearing more about the Student Loan Counseling Program soon. Bridget is leading the way in both development of the program and early certification.

Grant Professional Award Winner

Rachel Higgins, Grant Coordinator for CCOA, was awarded the Grant Professional Association's (GPA) President's Award for 2015. Sherri Hinrichs, GPA AR President, said, "It is very easy to honor excellence, and that is what Rachel gives."



Congratulations, Rachel!

Debt Free Clients of 2015

Imagine having your own business and despite investing a lot of time and money into it, it just results in a lot of debt and stress on your marriage.

Scott and Claudia Huse don't have to imagine that scenario because they lived it. In less than four years, the Springdale couple overcame \$159,000 of debt while on the Debt Management Program. Shedding all that debt, and all the financial stress that came with it, they became CCOA's Debt Free Grad Clients of 2015.

They met with financial counselor Mary Sanchez and enrolled in the Debt Management Program to repay their debt in full within five years. Their interest rates dropped from an average of 10% down to 2% and they saved \$22,000 in interest.



The Veteran's Financial Review

The Veteran's Financial Review is a FREE program for all veterans, active duty, guard, reserve and dependents. Available in person or by phone. It includes:

- Your credit report and score
- Review of your spending plan and tips on improving your cash flow and savings
- Call 479-521-8877 to schedule. Please mention the Veteran's Financial Review appointment.

Less Debt, More Life!

Since 1995, thousands of people have achieved financial freedom with CCOA. Counseling on budget, credit, debt and housing issues is free and confidential. For those struggling with debt, the Debt Management Program (DMP) has helped people get relief from financial stress as they pay down their credit card and medical debts. Key points about the DMP:

- A DMP can lower your monthly payments, which can be a tremendous financial stress-reliever.
- Your interest rates could be greatly reduced, allowing you to make faster progress paying off debt and save perhaps thousands of dollars in interest.
- Late fees and over-limit fees can stop.
- The DMP goal is to pay your unsecured debt back and become debt-free.
- It's NOT debt settlement. Debt settlement greatly hurts your credit score, pays back only part of what you owe (settling the debt for less), and can result in owing taxes on your forgiven debt by the IRS.
- FICO credit scoring takes no points off your credit score for going on a DMP. And as your debt goes down, your credit score goes up.
- DMP clients pay a monthly payment to CCOA. CCOA then pays your creditors. Many people enjoy simply making one payment to CCOA to pay their creditors rather than making eight different payments, for example.

Free Home Buying Classes

Free classes, but please register by emailing billr@ccoacares.com, calling (479) 521-8877, or registering on our website.

Jan. 9 (Sat) & Mar. 5 (Sat) 9:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
United Bank, 2790 S. Thompson, Springdale

Feb. 6 (Sat) 9:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
Fayetteville Public Library, 401 W. Mountain St., Fayetteville

The course offers a complete overview of the home buying process, including Q&A with representatives from the Realtor, mortgage lender and insurance industries. Eligible first-time home buyers may qualify for Arkansas Development Finance Authority down-payment assistance of up to \$10,000.