



Consumer Affairs Tabloid



Keeping you in the “KNOW”

287- CITY



Army Community Service Financial Readiness Branch



August 2007

Financial Readiness Branch CSI: Budget

Have you thought that maybe your budget was a part of a crime scene and it appears to be a mystery of where the money goes every month? You're not alone. Many people work hard every day, bring home a decent paycheck, and still have a difficult time making ends meet.

As any good crime scene detective would tell you, start at the scene of the crime. So let's gather up all the usual suspects (starting with those closest to you), and begin the investigation.

The investigation should begin with an honest calculation of how much you take in and how much you spend. Next list your fixed expenses. Fixed expenses are the same amount each month. Examples of fixed expenses are rent or mortgage, car payments, and car insurance. Your investigation will turn up some suspicious fingerprints in the form of variable expenses. Variable expenses can change from month to month. Your variable expenses will include things such as entertainment, clothing, gifts, eating out, cell phone bills, etc.

Your investigation should include all expenses, no matter how small. Small things such as buying coffee on the way to work, using the vending machine, and driving home for lunch daily versus packing your lunch can add up. We should consider all these things as 'items of interest' or maybe even suspects. They could be the key to solving the case of the unbalanced budget.

Once you have all your expenses listed, talk with all those closest to the case—your spouse, significant other, children--all who have a stake in balancing your budget. Together you should decide which suspects can be eliminated. While you may not be able to make drastic cuts, just reducing how much you spend on some items can go a long way toward helping balance your budget. For instance, if you're eating four meals out weekly, try cutting back to three. If you have all the premium channels for cable, could the family get by with one less premium channel? The important thing is to decide together what things you can perhaps do without in order to achieve your goal of a balanced budget.

And now you can take the crime scene tape down, this case is solved!



Army Community Service offers budget classes each Tuesday between 13:30-15:30 at the Lane Volunteer Center, Bldg 16005. Also check out more financial and consumer resources at www.hoodmwr.com/acs or www.myarmylifetoo.com



From the Files of Fort Hood's Consumer Affairs Office



Tips on cutting costs:

- ✓ Never purchase expensive items on impulse. Wait 2 weeks before making major purchases.
- ✓ Ride a bicycle to work.
- ✓ Save your loose change. Putting aside fifty cents a day over the course of a year will allow you to save nearly 40% of a \$500 emergency fund.
- ✓ Set up a savings account using direct deposit. You never see it and will never miss it.
- ✓ Plan gift-giving well in advance. That will give you time to decide on the most thoughtful gifts, which usually are not the most expensive ones. And if these gifts are products that must be purchased, you will have the opportunity to look for sales.
- ✓ Keep your car engine tuned and its tires inflated to their proper pressure. Doing both can save you up to \$100 a year in gas.

Back issues of the Consumer Affairs Tabloid are available on the Financial Readiness section of the ACS website at www.hoodmwr.com/acs.