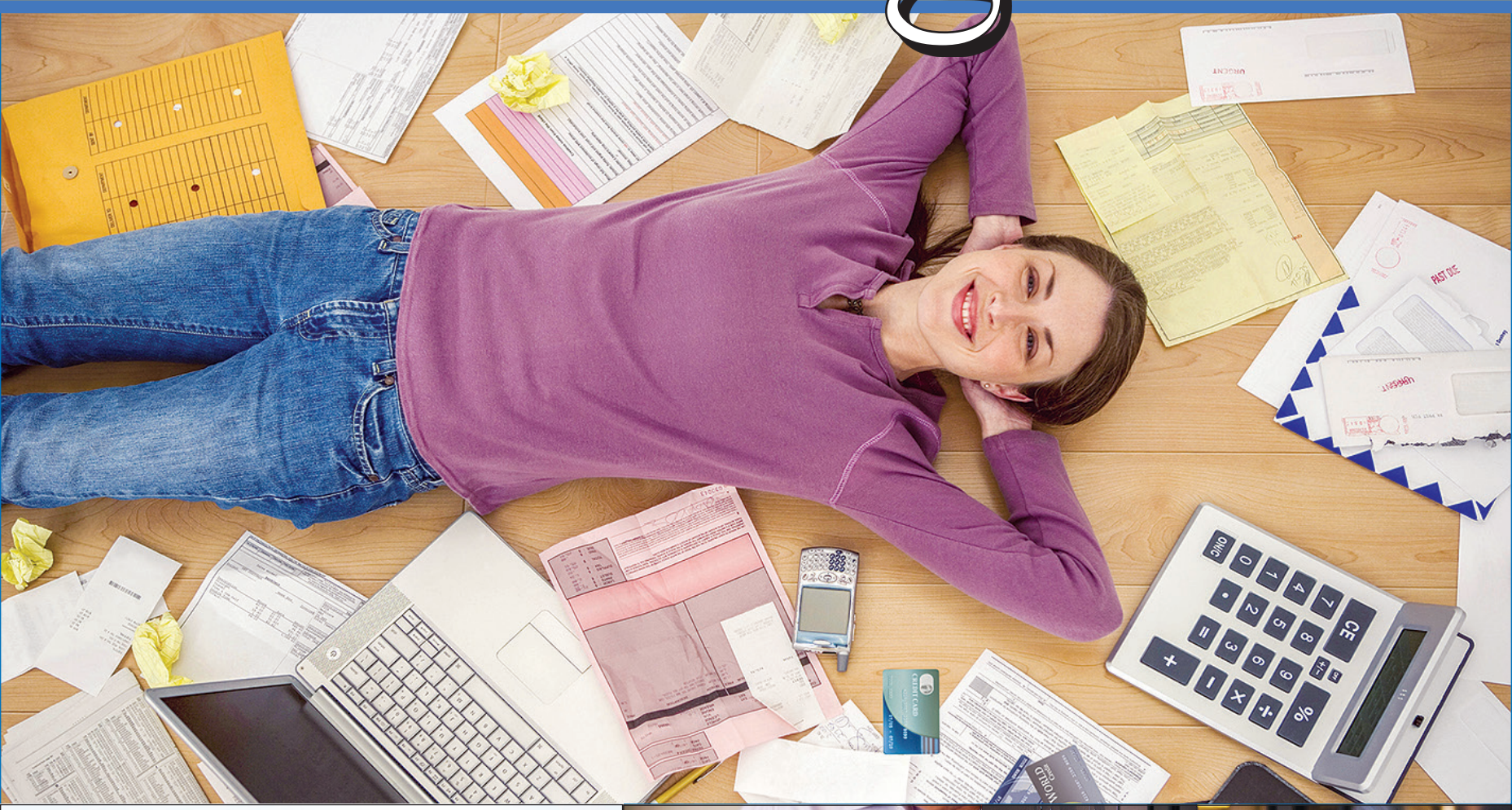




Investing

IN YOUR
FUTURE



The basics of



consumer credit

A strong credit score is an undeniable asset for consumers. A strong standing in the eyes of potential creditors can save consumers money on relatively short-term expenses like vehicles and long-term purchases like homes.

Consumer credit is so influential in the lives of the average person that it pays to have some knowledge of what it is and how individuals can use it to their advantage.

Who issues consumer credit?

Consumer credit is typically issued by banks and retailers. One common question consumers have is who owns credit cards, which are among the most recognizable and widely used forms of consumer credit.

Many credit card companies, including Visa, are now publicly held companies after years of being owned by banks. However, many major banks, including Capital One and Bank of America, issue credit cards as well.

What is a credit score?

According to the credit reporting agency Equifax, a credit score is a three-digit number which represents an individual consumer's credit risk. Credit risk refers to the likelihood that a borrower will pay their bills on time.

Scores are typically between 300 and 850, and the higher the score, the more creditworthy and less risky a consumer is in the eyes of creditors.

How credit scores are calculated

Three different consumer reporting agencies (CRAs), including Equifax, determine credit scores. That's why it's not uncommon for a single consumer to have three different scores. Those scores should be similar, and if they're not it's likely that one or more CRA reports has an error or errors.

A host of variables are considered when determining a credit score, and these include:

- Payment history
- Credit utilization ratio, which is the amount of credit used versus the total available credit
- Types of credit accounts a consumer has. This includes revolving credit accounts, like consumer credit cards, and installment accounts, which include mortgages and auto loans.
- Credit history length
- Frequency of credit inquiries (numerous inquiries in a short period of time generally lower a consumer's credit score)

Why a credit score is so important

Credit scores are so significant because they can cost or save consumers a substantial amount of money.

Consumers with poor scores, which are generally considered scores between 300 and 669, may not be eligible for auto or mortgage loans and may only be able to secure credit cards with high interest rates.

By contrast, consumers with scores considered very good to excellent (740 and above) generally get more favorable interest rates on sizable purchases like cars and homes, which can save borrowers tens of thousands of dollars over their lifetimes.

Managing credit is a vital component of financial planning. Knowing the basics to consumer credit can set individuals on a sound financial path.

(METRO CREATIVE)

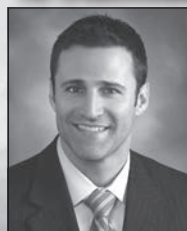
Credit scores are significant because they can cost or save consumers a substantial amount of money. Consumers with poor scores may not be eligible for auto or mortgage loans and may only be able to secure credit cards with high interest rates.

METRO CREATIVE PHOTO Investing in Your Future



COUNTRY
 AUTO | HOME | LIFE | BUSINESS | RETIREMENT
Mike Freier
 ▪ PECATONICA ▪
 michael.freier@countryfinancial.com
815-239-2110

A Successful Retirement Is The American Dream



LPL Financial
 Stocks ▪ Bonds ▪ Mutual Funds ▪ Advisory Services ▪ Annuities
 IRA's ▪ 401K Rollovers ▪ College Planning ▪ Life Insurance
**1019 1st Center Avenue, Ste. A
 Brodhead, WI**
 Member FINRA/SIPC
 and a Registered Investment Advisor
608-897-3015
 www.greenwoodswealthmanagement.com
In Business Since 1992

Securities offered through LPL Financial, Member FINRA/SIPC Insurance products offered through LPL Financial or its licensed affiliates

Not FDIC Insured	No Bank Guarantee	May Lose Value
Not a Deposit	Not Insured by any Federal Government Agency	

432392

Steps to secure your financial privacy

Safeguarding personal financial data has never been more important, as an increasingly digital world has made online banking that much more prevalent.

Cyber crimes are a significant concern. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, no less than 422 million individuals were impacted by cyber crime in 2022, and nearly 33 billion accounts were anticipated to be breached by the end of 2023 – figures not yet known.

Cyber crimes are happening every day, even if the public only hears about the largest data breaches.

Financial institutions as well as retailers and other businesses that require the use of personal financial information are obligated to safeguard customer data.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, financial institutions protect the privacy of consumers' finances under a federal law called the Financial Modernization Act of 1999, also known as the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act.

That law governs banks, securities firms, insurance companies, and companies providing many other types of products and services. The law dictates how financial institutions can collect and disclose customer's personal financial information.

Individuals also have key roles to play in protecting themselves. Though even the best precautions cannot completely secure your financial privacy, every little effort is worth it to reduce your risk of being victimized by data theft.

These tips from the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority can help individuals safeguard their privacy.



- You have the right to opt out of the sharing of some of your personal information with affiliates and non-affiliates of a financial institution. For example, you can opt out of receiving prescreened credit offers by way of credit bureaus selling information about you to

lenders or insurance.

- Increase awareness of phishing scams. These often are emails that appear to come from legitimate firms or financial regulators asking for personal information. These entities would never ask for account numbers, passwords, credit card

information, or Social Security numbers through email. Verify all communication with the financial institution by contacting that institution directly at the number listed on your account statement or bill.

- Be aware of where you click online. Never click on a questionable link or download a suspicious email attachment.

- Strong passwords can keep accounts more secure. Resist the urge to use the same password across many accounts. Once that password is compromised, the cyber criminal may be able to try it on your other accounts. Consider using a password manager to suggest and save strong and unique passwords for each account.

- Utilize multifactor authentication whenever it is available. MFA adds an extra layer of protection by using a password as well as a unique code or biometric to unlock the account.

- Conduct all financial business on a personal device on a secure network. Delete the cache and history frequently to avoid leaving a digital trace.

These steps can help protect financial security. Individuals need to be diligent in safeguarding their information from cyber criminals.

(METRO CREATIVE)

Cyber crimes are a significant concern in an increasingly digital world. The Financial Industry Regulatory Authority offers several tips that can help individuals safeguard their privacy.

METRO CREATIVE PHOTO Investing in Your Future

How long to hang on to your tax returns

As individuals attempt to more effectively organize their homes, they may come across a familiar pile of documents that they might hesitate to discard.

Conventional wisdom has suggested taxpayers hold on to their tax returns for at least seven years. However, the Internal Revenue Service indicates that the seven-year timeline is not necessarily applicable to everyone.

The IRS recommends taxpayers speak with their insurance company or creditors to see if they require account holders to hold on their tax records longer than the IRS.

If they don't, individuals can follow these guidelines, courtesy of the IRS.

1. Keep records for three years if situations (4), (5), and (6) below do not apply to you.
2. Keep records for three years from the date you filed your original return or two years from the date you paid the tax, whichever is later, if you file a claim for credit or refund after you file your return.
3. Keep records for seven years if you file a claim for a loss from worthless securities or bad debt deduction.

4. Keep records for six years if you do not report income that you should report, and it is more than 25 percent of the gross income shown on your return.
5. Keep records indefinitely if you do not file a return.
6. Keep records indefinitely if you file a fraudulent return.
7. Keep employment tax records for at least 4 years after the date that the tax becomes due or is paid, whichever is later.

These can serve as guidelines taxpayers can follow if they are attempting to declutter at home but don't want to discard tax returns they might someday need. Taxpayers also can consult with their accountants or tax preparers for advice on how long to keep their returns.

In addition, those who want to keep their returns can scan relevant return documents and then store them digitally on an external hard drive. This frees up space in a home and can calm any fears about discarding returns taxpayers may have.

(METRO CREATIVE)

Investing IN YOUR Future

EDITOR: Melanie Bradley
 EDITOR IN CHIEF Heather Ruenz
 CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Heidi Schulz
 ADVERTISING DIRECTOR: Vicki Vanderwerff
 SECTION DESIGNER: Jen DeGroot



A publication of Rock Valley Publishing, LLC • 1102 Ann St., Delavan, WI 53115 • (262) 728-3411
FOR ADVERTISING OPPORTUNITIES: Call (262) 725-7701, ext. 134



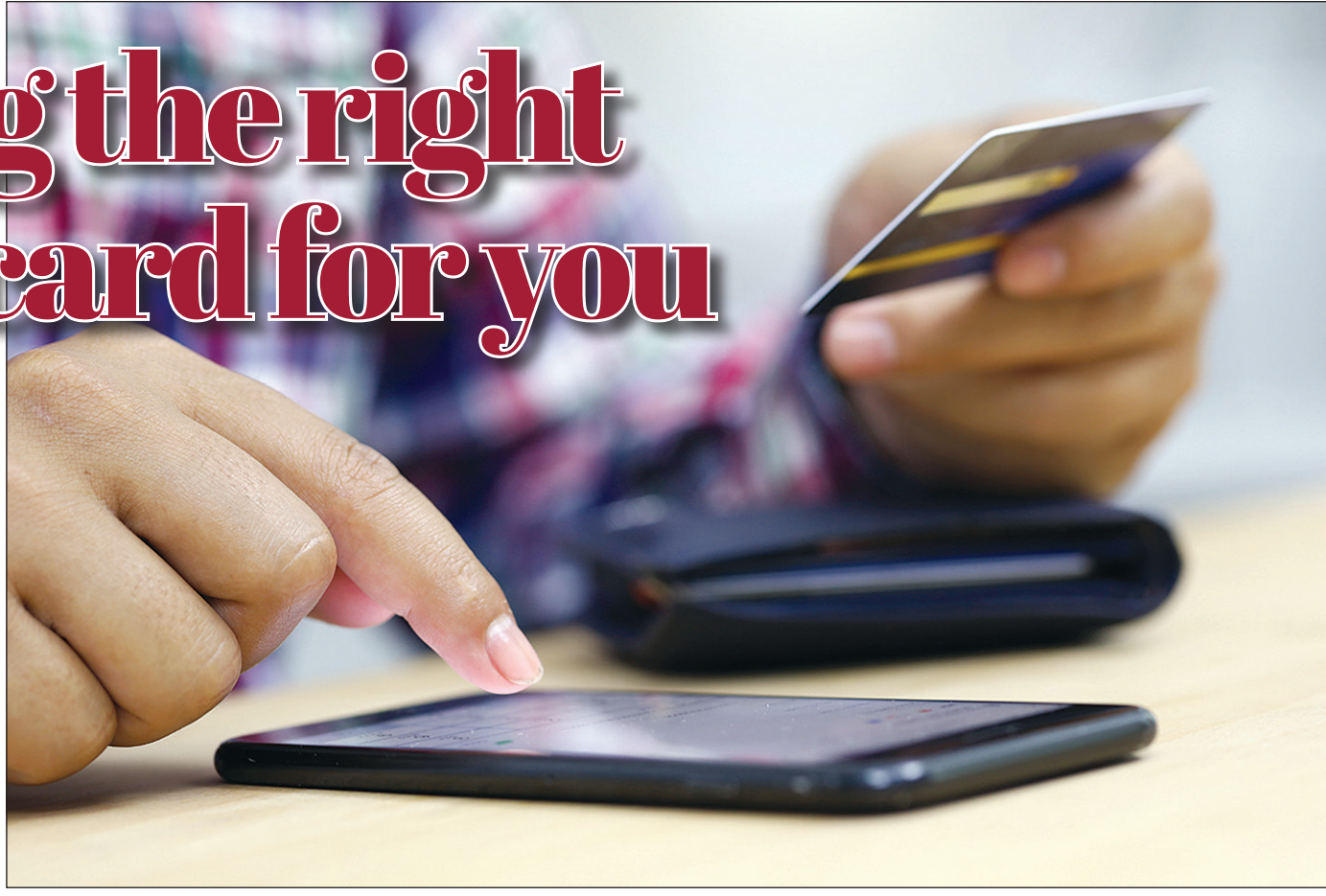
State Farm[®]

JEFF FARNSWORTH, AGENT
7 East Main Street, Suite 5
Evansville, WI 53536-1143
608-882-4323

AUTO • HOMEOWNERS • CONDOS
 RENTERS • PERSONAL ARTICLES
 BUSINESS • LIFE • HEALTH • PET



Finding the right credit card for you



Credit cards are a preferential method of payment for millions of consumers. They make buying items online convenient and provide more security than debit cards, which are directly tied to a bank account.

The modern credit card was invented in 1950 and was known as the Diners Club card. The idea came from Frank McNamara and business partner Ralph Schneider, who conceived of a way to pay without carrying cash after McNamara had forgotten his wallet while out to dinner in New York.

Since that fateful, forgetful night for McNamara, the credit card industry has boomed, and WalletHub notes that consumers now have more than 1,500 credit cards to choose from.

Having so many options can make finding the right card somewhat challenging. Explore these methods to narrow down your prospects.

Type of cardholder

The next step is to identify which type of cardholder you are. WalletHub says cards are designed for specific types of users and are geared toward particular groups' interests and financial needs.

These can include cards for students,

those for people with poor credit histories, small business cards, or cards for general consumers.

Know your credit score

Before applying for a new credit card, it is important to know your credit score. The better your credit score, the greater the

chance of being approved for a card which offers strong perks.

Define your goals

Credit cards also are broken down by their perks. Cardholders need to think about what they want out of a card.

For example, some credit cards are marketed to travelers and enable cardholders to earn travel miles or points toward hotel stays.

Other cards offer cash back on a percentage of purchases, like 2- to 5-percent back on qualifying categories. Some credit cards help you improve your credit when it's limited or damaged, says NerdWallet.

Balance transfer policies and interest rates

Another consideration on credit cards is whether they offer introductory low- or no-interest rates on balance transfers that enable you to transfer balances from high-interest cards to the new card.

Although it's always best to pay off your credit card balance with each statement, that isn't always possible. When shopping for a card, it helps to find one with a low



Having so many options can make finding the right credit card somewhat challenging. It's recommended to explore a variety of methods to narrow down your prospects.

METRO CREATIVE PHOTOS *Investing in Your future*

Rockford Bell Credit Union

Online Services make life easier.

BETTER SERVICE, BETTER RATES
Because we're
Member OWNED

More options, more
convenience, more security.



2 Locations
to serve you:
Loves Park
815.636.2100
 4225 Perryville Rd.

Mount Morris
815.734.6427
 4 E. Main St.

Go to www.rbcu.net or call a branch near you.
 *Mobile banking requires prior registration for Rockford Bell Credit Union Online Banking.

432279

Pam Cunningham
Real Estate help is just a call away!
815-289-6323
www.PamCunninghamRealtor.com

Professional Service
And
Marketing Power

SOLD!

 GoGambino.com

411885

annual percentage rate (APR).

Additional features

Some credit cards will offer tools such as charts that can help you keep track of spending categories or will automatically advise you of your credit score. Secured or student cards can incrementally raise your credit limit as you establish good credit history. A card that has no late fees or penalty interest rate increases also can come in handy.

There are various factors to consider when shopping for a new credit card. By narrowing down the major points of comparison, consumers can find a card that suits their specific needs.

FROM EVERYDAY NEEDS TO A FUTURE THAT'S **UNIQUELY YOURS.**

- Checking
- Savings
- Loans
- Financial Planning
- Investments
- **& more for you
or your business.**



midlandsb.com
1-855-696-4352

Midland 
States Bank®

Midland 
Wealth Management

Midland Wealth Management is a trade name used by Midland States Bank, Midland Trust Company, and Midland Wealth Advisors, LLC. Midland States Bank is Member FDIC. Investment Products and Services are: Not FDIC Insured | May Lose Value | No Bank Guarantee

Edward Jones®

Member SIPC

**Stocks. Bonds. CDs. IRAs.
Mutual Funds.**

Let's review your goals.



Bryan G Orvis
Financial Advisor
4059 N Perryville Rd
Loves Park, IL 61111
815-654-1463

MKT-58940-A AECSPAD

edwardjones.com

450325

How to save some money on travel

Many people are feeling the pinch of a higher cost of living, as prices for everything from food to gasoline to utilities have increased over the last few years.

Some individuals are being much more budget-conscious and scaling back their discretionary spending. Travel may have fallen victim to this perfect storm of rising costs and personal financial austerity.

Rather than giving up travel altogether, which can be a detriment to personal health and well-being, individuals concerned about vacation costs can look to ways to save some money.

Avoid checked-bag fees – Packing light can help travelers avoid paying extra for checked baggage or overage fees on heavy suitcases. Maximize space in carry-ons so you won't need to confront higher costs at the airport.

Use a flight search aggregator – Sites like Google Flights will pull together several flight options based on the criteria entered. This helps customers figure out where they can get the best deals on flights. Flying out of an airport that's a little further away may help travelers save some money.

Travel off-season – Avoiding peak seasons for certain desirable destinations will help travelers save on everything from transportation to accommodations. Furthermore, tourists will be less plentiful when the season isn't at its peak.

Travel at off-peak times – Similar

to traveling off-season, try booking trips earlier in the week, as Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday could translate to better deals on flights and hotel rooms.

Utilize a mileage credit card – Credit cards often have built-in perks. Some give cash-back on a percentage of money spent while others geared toward travel may offer airline mileage or discounts on hotels or resorts. For those who will be spending anyway, it can pay to use a card that will reward that spending on travel.

Sign up for a loyalty program – Hotel chains may waive certain fees for loyalty members. Often loyalty clubs are simple to sign up for and include perks like extended check-in or check-out times, meal vouchers or even discounted rates.

Consider an Airbnb – The debate over the merits of a traditional hotel or an Airbnb continues. While one is not inherently cheaper than the other, an Airbnb could be a better bet for large families or those traveling with extra people. That's because Airbnb lodgings may have extra square footage that prevents the need to secure two or more hotel rooms. Also, being able to cook some meals on premises will reduce dining expenses in the long run.

Many are concerned with travel costs. However, by exploring money-saving tips, it's possible to enjoy an affordable getaway.

(METRO CREATIVE)

Mosher & associates

insurance services

BUSINESS • FARM • PERSONAL

15 E. Main Street
Evansville, WI 53536

608-882-0000

Monday-Thursday
7:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Friday
8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

ARGYLE • EVANSVILLE • MONROE
NEW GLARUS • VERONA

450594



Prepare for YOUR FUTURE

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS AVAILABLE

Contact your guidance counselor for applications!

DEADLINES FAST APPROACHING!

450676

Financial mistakes anyone can avoid



Earnings go a long way toward determining an individual's financial security. However, high wages do not guarantee long-term financial security any more than lower wages ensure a future marked by a lack of financial flexibility.

Individuals are a unique variable in any financial equation, and those who can exercise and maintain some fiscal discipline are more likely to secure long-term security than those who cannot.

One way anyone can improve their chances at a secure and flexible financial future is to identify and avoid some common mistakes.

Avoiding the following mistakes can increase the chances individuals at various income levels enjoy a secure financial future.

Spending beyond your means

The post-pandemic increase in cost-of-living has garnered considerable attention in recent years, when inflation has driven up the cost of just about everything. There's little consumers can do about the rising cost of living, but making a concerted effort to curtail spending is one way to combat the spike.

However, surveys indicate many people earning significant salaries are living paycheck-to-paycheck. For example, a recent report from LendingClub Corporation found that nearly 40 percent of individuals with annual incomes greater than \$100,000 live paycheck to paycheck, with 12 percent reporting they are struggling to pay their bills.

An assortment of variables undoubtedly contribute to that stark reality, and one might be a tendency for



consumers to spend beyond their means.

Individuals who are struggling to curtail their spending are urged to seek the help of a certified financial planner who can help them devise a budget and alleviate some of the stress and pressure associated with overspending or living paycheck to paycheck.

Delay saving for retirement

Conventional wisdom says it's never too early to begin saving for retirement. Despite that, surveys indicate many adults are behind on saving. A recent survey from Bankrate found that 55 percent of respondents indicated they were behind on their retirement savings, while 35 percent reported being "significantly behind."

Though laws governing retirement contributions have made it easier for people to catch up, it's still better to begin saving once you enter the professional arena, which for most people is some time in their early to mid-twenties.

The longer you delay saving for retirement, the more precarious your financial future becomes.

Poor use of credit

Credit cards can be a financial safety blanket, but that blanket can soon smother consumers who don't know how and when to utilize credit. Reserve credit cards for emergency situations and resist the temptation to use them for daily expenses, such as groceries and gas.

Credit card interest rates tend to be in the double digits, so unless card holders

can pay their balances in full each month, they're only exacerbating the already high cost of living by using credit for daily expenses.

Buying too much house

Overspending on housing is another financial mistake, and arguably the one that's the most difficult to avoid. It can be hard to walk away from a dream home, but such a decision could secure your financial future.

Unfortunately, data indicates far too many individuals are spending more on housing than conventional financial wisdom recommends. The most recent Consumer Expenditure Survey from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that spending on housing accounted for 33 percent of the average household's monthly expenses and that the average household spent 88 percent of its after-tax income each month. That latter figure is especially troubling, as conventional financial wisdom recommends a saving rate of 20 percent.

Overspending on housing greatly affects a person's ability to save and invest, so resisting the temptation to buy that expensive dream home could be the difference between a secure or scary financial future.

Avoiding some common mistakes can help individuals be more financially flexible and secure over the long haul.

(METRO CREATIVE)

Avoiding some common mistakes – such as buying too much house – can increase the chances individuals at various income levels enjoy a secure financial future.

METRO CREATIVE PHOTOS Investing in Your Future



Focused on **FAMILY BUSINESS** Because we are one!

We understand family businesses because we are one.
We are a family-focused bank that knows what it takes for businesses to thrive – local support, hard work, and Sound Advice makes all the difference
You can count on all the above from us.

Give us a try. We'll treat you like family.



**First National Bank
and Trust Company[®]**

Contact our Small Business Banking team to learn more

Member FDIC

Visit bankatfirstnational.com

800.667.4401

450484

**Greenwoods
State Bank**

Every little bit helps.

**Add \$25 or more as many times
as you'd like with our 12 Month
Add On CD and earn 2.50% APY***

greenwoods.bank |  



Evansville Branch:

**12 J Lindemann Dr., Evansville, WI 53536
608-882-6010**



*Annual Percentage Yield accurate as of 01/26/2024. \$25.00 minimum deposit to open. APY is variable and may change after the account is opened. Two penalty-free withdrawals allowed each calendar year. Penalty may be imposed for any withdrawal over two in a calendar year. Fees could reduce earnings. This offer is subject to change at any time without notice. Personal accounts only.