

Three tips to stretch your dollars

You don't need me to tell you that we're enduring the worst economic times since the Great Depression.

We deal daily with the repercussions of the lingering recession. Everything costs more while the value of what we've saved declines. It's scary. And while many of you know this from your own experiences, the struggling economy in fact really does hurt seniors more than others.

In this article we'll talk a little about the erosion of seniors' buying power and you'll get some tips that can help you stretch your precious dollars.

First, the facts: Seniors have lost almost one-third of their buying power since 2000, according to the Annual Survey of Senior Costs, released last month by The Senior Citizens League (TSLC).

In most years, seniors receive a small increase in their Social Security checks, intended to help

BRING YOUR HEALTH HOME

KIMBERLY HARMON
RN, BSN

them keep up with the costs of inflation. But since 2000, the Social Security Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) has increased just 31 percent, while typical senior expenses have jumped 73 percent — more than twice as fast.

Some expenses have gone up ridiculous amounts: From 2000-2011, the percent increase in the cost of heating oil (per gallon) was 190 percent, of natural gas (per gallon) was 171 percent, 95 percent for a dozen eggs and 72 percent for a pound of oranges.

And, readers, it's likely going to get worse. In 2011, for the second consecutive year, seniors received no COLA. Prior to 2010, seniors had

received a COLA every year since 1975, when the automatic COLA was introduced. With seniors forecast to receive a very small COLA next year, these tight economic times are likely to continue.

"To put it in perspective, for every \$100 worth of expenses seniors could afford in 2000, they can afford just \$68 today," said Larry Hyland, chairman of The Senior Citizens League.

But let's not dwell on the bad news. Instead, let's focus on what we can do to get the most bang for our bucks. Most of you know these tips: My staff shares your strategies with me, and here are the three that I think are most helpful.

1) Control housing costs: These take one of the biggest shares of your income, whether you rent or own. You can reduce home maintenance costs over the long term by having a seasonal maintenance plan and finding a trustworthy "handyman" to implement that plan. Here's an easy one — read appliance manu-

als and file them. A lot of manuals contain trouble-shooting sections; you can sometimes avoid a costly service call by trying the suggested solution. Keep manuals filed in a common area, or keep the manual with the appliance. Tape a plastic file sleeve or large manila envelope to an inconspicuous but accessible side of your appliance, and slide in the manual to keep it handy.

2) Use "senior" bargains and benefits: Age has its privileges, and one of them is taking advantage of senior discounts on travel, entertainment, restaurants and shopping, as well as age-related benefits on insurance, prescription drugs, health care and other services. Seniorsdiscounts.com is a good resource for saving on thousands of products and services. Plus, everywhere you go, ask for the Senior Discount.

3) Cut and use grocery coupons. Coupon clippers are always looking for additional ways to save and finding stores that double coupons is

one of those ways. In our area, some of the grocery stores that double coupons include Park 'N Shop, Price Chopper, Star Market, and Stop & Shop. One of our clients even makes coupon clipping into a weekly game of poker!

As always, the Auburn VNA Health Network Team is available for your health and wellness needs with a complete range of home care services. For more information or questions, please call us at 508-791-0081. Be happy, be well and be safe!

Kimberly Harmon is President and CEO of the Auburn VNA Health Network. The AVHN provides more than 19,000 home visits annually to more than 700 individuals in Auburn, Worcester and surrounding towns. Kim welcomes your questions, comments or concerns about any specific health issues. You may reach her at kharmom@auburnvna.org or 508-791-0081.

Weather tower to go up soon behind Home Depot

TOWER

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The data collection will be done over a 12- to 14-month period in order to accurately determine the feasibility of wind turbines being installed in the near future.

Burney added that Home Depot has been notified of the town's continued work behind the store, but they have not responded positively or negatively about it.

"We're still meeting all their conditions," he said.

Burney said last month it had taken several months just to get the access agreement granted by Home Depot.

"As to the process there was a request filed with the Home Depot Corporation's home office in Atlanta, Georgia which included the submission of plans and a description of the work proposed and an estimated timeline; this led to some general discussions about the Home Depot Corporation's concerns and procedures they would prefer to be used. The result is the aforementioned temporary access license agreement. From the initial inquiry to the signature of the final agreement took approximately seven months," Burney said.

The tower is set to be installed sometime in July and will mark significant progress in this project.

"It is a major step to get where we are,"

Coyle said.

Platukis added, "I'm really happy to see we're getting a tower up there."

Coyle also offered his assistance and the use of town vehicles as necessary to help during the installation of the tower.

Also, during the Wind Turbine and Alternative Energy Committee meeting, Town Manager Julie Jacobson updated the committee on the town's progress on becoming a Green Community through a Climate Action Plan, which would make the town eligible for certain grants.

"Once we get this in place we'll be in a better position to apply for grants," she said.

Burney will act as the project manager on

the Green Climate Management Plan. He has already drafted an International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives Resolution (ICLEI) that includes the Five Milestones for Climate Change Adaptation that have to be met to be considered a Green community.

The five criteria are conducting a climate resiliency study, set preparedness goals, develop climate preparedness plan, publish and implement preparedness plan, and monitor and reevaluate resiliency.

Amy Stanfield may be reached at (508) 909-4142, or by e-mail at astanfield@stonebridgepress.com.

Chamber presents 'Best of Auburn' business contest

AUBURN — The Auburn Chamber of Commerce is pleased to announce its call for nominations for the "Best of Auburn" Business Contest.

This contest is designed to allow the community to vote for their favorite Auburn Businesses.

The "Best of Auburn" Business Contest Categories include: Food/Beverage, Entertainment, Business/Service, and "Best Dressed" Business Awards.

The public is invited to nominate their "favorite Auburn businesses" during the months of July and August. Online voting is strongly encouraged at the Chamber's website: www.auburnchamberma.com. Paper nomination forms are available throughout the Auburn community including at banks, Auburn Town Hall, and the Auburn Public Library or by request from Eleanor F Houbre at 508.753.2924, ext. 224 or info@auburnchamberma.com.

The deadline for submission of nominations is Wednesday, August 31.

Please return all paper nomination forms to Auburn Chamber of Commerce, "Best of Auburn" Business Contest, c/o 446 Main Street, Suite 200, Worcester, MA 01608; or fax to 508-754-8560.

Winners will be announced and awarded at the Auburn Chamber's Membership Breakfast on Oct. 12, at Pakachoag Church, 203 Pakachoag St., Auburn.

Last year, more than 2,500 votes were received resulting in 27 recipients who proudly display their "best of" awards.

For additional information, contact Eleanor F Houbre, Director of Chamber Services at 508-753-2924, ext. 224 or at info@auburnchamberma.com.

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Tufts Health Plan Medicare Preferred representatives are available Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. (and 7 days a week, 8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. from October 15 - February 14). After hours and on holidays, please leave us a message and we'll get back to you the next business day.

*Ratings awarded by Medicare.gov.

Other physicians and providers are available in our network. Tufts Medicare Preferred HMO is not available in Berkshire, Franklin, Dukes and Nantucket Counties and some towns in Bristol and Plymouth Counties. Tufts Health Plan Medicare Preferred is a Medicare Advantage organization with a Medicare contract.

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