

# Natural Disaster Money Tips

Flood, fire, earthquakes and other natural disasters can wreak havoc with your personal life - including your finances. The following tips can help organize your thoughts and tasks during this difficult time.

## Insurance

Review your insurance coverage and file claims as soon as possible. If you have trouble understanding your policies, consider hiring a licensed public adjuster. He or she can help you understand your coverage, submit paperwork and act as a personal advocate. There is a fee for the service, but it could be worth it.



## Credit

- Take inventory of your credit cards. If you cannot locate them, call the issuers immediately to report them missing.
- Use credit cards prudently. You may not have the means to repay large balances later.
- Know your credit limits. If you absolutely have to exceed them, request higher limits rather than going over. Doing so can help you avoid costly penalties.
- Avoid using cash advances. Since interest (typically at a much higher rate than for purchases) accrues immediately, they are a pricey way to acquire funds.
- Beware of scams. Pass on credit and loan offers that seem too easy to obtain, list a 900 number (you could be calling out of country and be charged \$4 a minute or more), or have you pay a fee before you can receive money. If you need a loan, contact lenders you know and trust.
- Reject unsolicited and fee-based offers to fill out loan and grant applications. If you need assistance, go through your financial institution or another reputable organization.
- Do not reveal your Social Security number, credit card information (number and expiration date), or checking account number over the telephone unless you made the initial phone call.

## Income and expenses

Develop a financial priority list. Your budget may be seriously affected by reduced income and increased expenses, so consider each line item carefully. Keep the bulk of your money in your financial institution. Cash in pocket is far riskier than cash in a checking or savings account. If you are unable to meet all of your financial obligations, communicate with your lenders as soon as possible. In a letter to each:

- Explain your situation in detail.
- Request specific solutions. Depending on your circumstances, ask for either reduced or suspended payments. Be realistic - never propose more than you can afford to pay.
- Include the date that you would be able to resume normal payments (if possible).
- Include relevant documentation.
- Keep copies of all correspondence.
- Update your lenders regularly.

A financial education and counseling service called BALANCE is available to you as a benefit of membership in the credit union. Call 888-456-2227 or check out their website - [www.balancepro.net](http://www.balancepro.net). Copyright © 2005 BALANCE



## Employee of the Year

Congratulations to Bryn Laszlo, Manager of WECU's Call Center, who has been selected by her fellow employees as the 2008 LaMoine Peth Employee of the Year. The voting among the four candidates, Bryn, David Burmeister, Xochitl Garcia, and Jason Ufkes was extremely close, and all of them deserve to be recognized for their individual contributions to the success of WECU.



## Tax time!

Don't Forget: Tax time is here and WECU is proud to offer you two great ways to file.

### TurboTax

File your taxes online with TurboTax Federal Free Edition at [www.wecu.com](http://www.wecu.com). Just click on the Turbo Tax link and you are on your way!

- Prepare, print and efile your federal return for FREE.
- Turbo Tax helps you get the Maximum Refund you deserve with little hassle!
- Help & advice is available online with answers to your questions 24/7.
- Get a fast refund in as few as 8 days when you efile and use direct deposit.

### Jackson Hewitt - Save \$25.00

Filing taxes online is not for everyone and it can be a complicated and confusing process. At Jackson Hewitt Tax Service, you'll find trained tax preparers who understand your income tax situation. The preparers will address your concerns and answer all of your tax questions with professional, friendly service. Visit [www.wecu.com](http://www.wecu.com) to print your \$25.00 discount coupon or stop by our nearest branch!

Whether you prefer to self-prepare online or work with a tax professional, we have a solution for you. To get started today, visit [www.wecu.com](http://www.wecu.com) or call 1-800-613-4406.

## Are you moving?

If so, please remember to provide WECU with your new address. You can do this 24/7 Online through Emax, toll-free through our Call Center, or in person at any of our 11 branches.

## Get driven ... to invest in America!

WECU has teamed up with GM and Chrysler to help our members Invest in America. All eligible current and new members have the unique opportunity to get a great discount on a new vehicle from GM or Chrysler. While the discounts vary depending on which vehicle you choose, everyone will drive away with a great deal. Depending on your choice, you could save thousands of dollars.

The deal gets even better when you finance your vehicle with us. Thanks to our low loan rates, your savings will add up quickly. You'll be doing your part to help the local economy when you buy an American-made car and finance it through us.

Start driving your discount. For more information on Invest in America and how to get your credit union discount, visit [www.LoveMyCreditUnion.org](http://www.LoveMyCreditUnion.org).

## Business of the Year

The Ferndale Chamber of Commerce recently awarded Whatcom Educational Credit Union the 2008 Business of the Year. As a financial institution community involvement is a huge priority for WECU and we have strong ties to the Ferndale community. We are honored to be chosen as the Business of the Year, especially considering the other fantastic businesses that were nominated. With 11 branches in Whatcom County and over 56,000 members, WECU is Whatcom County's largest member-owned, not-for-profit financial cooperative, serving all residents of Whatcom County. Thanks to our members, employees and volunteers for making WECU such a positive and successful part of Whatcom County.

## 2010 WECU Calendar contest update

We have had a fantastic showing already from all of our WECU photographers, so keep the photos coming! Thirteen lucky photographers will have their work featured in the 2010 WECU calendar. In order to submit you must be a WECU member. Please note that photo contest winners will not receive monetary compensation for use of their photos. You may submit a maximum of 3 photos; photos must be of scenes in Whatcom County and should focus on landscapes rather than people. Photos must be at least 300 dpi resolution and 11.25" by 7.75". They can be in tif eps or jpeg format but must be high resolution. Please email photos to [kessa.volland@wecu.com](mailto:kessa.volland@wecu.com) or drop them off Attn: Kessa Volland on disk at any branch - be sure to include your name and contact information. The deadline for photo submissions is May 1st, 2009.

# social responsibility spotlight

## Thanks to our generous WECU members



We are incredibly pleased to report the success of this year's Salvation Army Angel Tree Drive. The Angel Tree program helps get holiday gifts into the hands of local children who would otherwise go without. WECU's Branch Managers were astonished by the

participation and generosity of our members. Our larger branches - Holly, Birchwood and Sunset - each had well over 100 tags taken and gifts provided. Our smaller branches were equally successful and contributed anywhere from 25-75 gifts per branch.

Ferndale, Blaine and Lynden participated in similar drives through other local non-profits. Lynden worked with Project Hope, Ferndale with The Giving Store and Blaine participated in The Giving Tree. The three branches reported that their respective drives were quite successful.

Thanks to all of the WECU members who participated in our various holiday giving programs and brought smiles to children in Whatcom County. Also a big thanks to the organizations that administer the drives; our communities are much stronger due to your efforts.

## \$9,000 to be awarded in 2009

Each year, WECU awards a number of scholarships to deserving students who plan to enroll in degree programs at local schools. To be eligible, students must be a WECU member in good standing. In the fall of 2009, these eight scholarships will be awarded:



- (2) \$1500 scholarships to Western Washington University. These scholarships will be awarded to full-time students pursuing a degree, with the equivalent of junior or senior status as of Fall quarter 2008.
- (2) \$1000 scholarships to each of the following: Whatcom Community College, Bellingham Technical College and Northwest Indian College. These scholarships are for full-time students taking a minimum of 12 credit hours and working toward degrees. Applications are available only through each school's financial aid office or website. Application deadlines vary, but are usually in early to mid April. For more information contact the schools directly, or visit our website at [www.wecu.com](http://www.wecu.com)

## NON-PROFIT OF THE MONTH

### YWCA Bellingham

YWCA Bellingham advocates for the basic needs of women in Whatcom County. They offer residents low-cost housing, including utilities. The Larrabee Residence serves 36 women nightly and over 100 yearly. Residents receive one-on-



one meetings with our housing director, a private phone number, mailing address, food donations, clothing, bus passes and financial mentoring. It houses 28 transitional private rooms with a shared kitchen, bath facilities and 9 semi-private emergency alcoves, free of charge for up to 60 days. In 1998, thanks to Soroptimist International of Bellingham, the Back-To-Work Boutique opened. This program provides free professional clothing to women re-entering the workplace or returning to school. Clients have a one-on-one meeting with a consultant who helps them find work-appropriate clothing. YWCA also has a Prom Dress Program. Young, low-income women can make an appointment to select from hundreds of beautiful formal dresses for their prom. Also offered is a Community Clothing Give-Away. Any donated clothing that does not get used in the Boutique will go to the give-away. If interested in volunteering, pick up a volunteer application between 9 and 5 Monday-Friday or call Operations Manager Janet Marino at (360) 734-4820 x 103.

**WECU will be closed on Monday, February 16th in observance of Presidents' Day.**

## member info

### Visa rebates total more than \$900,000

WECU Visa credit card holders got a fabulous New Year's gift: a total of \$946,742 was returned to members on their January, 2009 statement. This reflects the 1% cash back for over \$94 million in member purchases made in 2008. WECU's 1% discount on every single purchase you make is our way of saying "Thank you!" for choosing your WECU credit card over the other cards in your wallet.

### Tax Filing Assistance

Individuals or families of low to moderate income with basic tax filing needs can receive free assistance from Whatcom Asset Building Coalition, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). Volunteers help you with all areas of tax filing, such as claiming deductions and applying for credits. Credits such as The Earned Income Tax Credit can be up to \$4,824, depending on income and family size. For a list of tax preparation sites in Whatcom County, visit [www.wecu.com](http://www.wecu.com).

### 2009 BIA Home and Garden Show



Looking for a way to spice up your home? Be sure to come visit us at this year's BIA Home and Garden Show at the Northwest Washington Fairgrounds in Lynden March 6-8th. WECU's booth will feature

all sorts of fantastic give-aways and a drawing for an assortment of home décor related prizes.

### WECU Member Shred Day

Tax time is coming and many of you are digging through files and cleaning house. It's time to rid yourself of your old sensitive documents! Our Spring Shred Day will take place on Saturday, April 18th at our Holly branch. Members can bring 2 boxes or bags of documents to be shredded. Come on down to shred and recycle all of those old documents that have been piling up in your garage for years! The event will take place in the Holly drive-up and will feature a giant shred truck that you can't miss, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

## seminars

**Details:** This free seminar will be presented in the WECU Education Center at 511 East Holly St. in Bellingham, and is open to the public. **Reservations are required.** RSVP online at [www.wecu.com](http://www.wecu.com) [Your CU/Seminars] or call our reservation line at 676.1168, ext. 7000.

### Are All of Your Assets Protected?

**Wednesday, February 11th, 7:00 to 8:30 pm**

Local insurance experts teach us what types of protection you should have in case the unthinkable happens.

### Transitioning Your Garden from Winter to Spring

**Thursday, March 19th, 7:00 to 8:30 pm**

Is your garden ready for spring? If the answer is no or you are just not sure, we have the perfect seminar for you! Join Bakerview Nursery and WECU as we teach you some tricks of the trade to helping your yard make the transition from those bitter cold months to the rainy Northwest springtime.

### Estate Planning

**Wednesday, March 25th, 7:00 to 8:30 pm**

Estate taxes have been reduced, but it is still important to have a sound estate plan. A well-designed estate plan will assure that you and those you care about enjoy the security of your assets. Estate planning is not just about taxes, it's also about providing for your comfort during your lifetime, efficiently transferring assets to beneficiaries and achieving family objectives. Financial Consultant John L. Ayotte and a guest Estate Planning Attorney will discuss estate planning strategies you may want to consider to help you achieve your financial goals.

### 5 Wishes: A Living Will Workshop

**Wednesday, April 29th, 7:00 to 8:30 pm**

Whatcom End-of-Life Council's Karen Ssebanakitta presents a 2-hour interactive workshop where participants can explore ways to direct their own treatment should they become too ill to speak for themselves. A completed Five Wishes® booklet is recognized as a legal Advance Directive ("Living Will") in most states. Five Wishes® is a trademark of Aging with Dignity.

### But What if I Live? Retirement Seminar

**Wednesday, May 20th, 7:00 to 8:30 pm**

Based on the book, "But What if I Live? The American Retirement Crisis", attendees will get the answers to many of the tough questions about retirement today.