



# Consumer News & Views

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN CONSUMER COUNCIL



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## Consumer Confidence Increases in November



The Consumer Sentiment Index released Friday by the University of Michigan (UM) Surveys of Consumers increased to 102.0 this month from a downwardly revised 99.1 in October. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the index dipping to 101.0 from the previously reported 102.6.

U.S. consumer confidence rose in November after three straight monthly declines, though households continued to anticipate a recession over the next year.

- Consumers planning big-ticket purchases like motor vehicles and houses over the next six months even as they continued to fret over higher prices and interest rates.
- Most economists are not forecasting a recession, but rather a period of very slow growth.
- The improvement in confidence was concentrated mostly among households aged 55 and up. Consumers in the 35-54 age group were less optimistic about their prospects.

**Present Situation** - Consumers' assessment of current business conditions was, on balance, slightly more positive in November.

- 19.8% of consumers said business conditions were "good," up from 18.3% in October.
- However, 19.5% said business conditions were "bad," up from 18.8%.

**Expectations Index** - Remains below 80 for a third consecutive month—a level that historically signals a recession within the next year.

## Consumer “wallet shift” is creating retail industry “return to normalcy”



‘Tis the season for holiday shopping and Black Friday deals, and experts from the National Retail Federation are causing a “wallet shift” stir about the state of the American consumer.

“When you look at consumer spending data, consumers are still powering the U.S. economy, they’re still spending. Seventy-percent of GDP is consumer spending. So what we believe we’re seeing is actually just a change in where the consumer spending is, not necessarily a real significant reduction in overall consumer spend,” NRF director of research Mark Mathews told FOX News Digital.

“We’re pretty bullish that we’re going to have a good, solid holiday period, that it looks more like the holidays that we had pre-pandemic,” he continued. “Not this supercharged retail that we saw during the pandemic, but nonetheless, a return to normal trends.”

According to NRF data, consumer spending is expected to reach record levels for the remainder of this year, between \$957.3 billion and \$966.6 billion which is a 3 to 4% increase from 2022. Each individual consumer is expected to spend nearly \$900 on winter holiday shopping, with their research director claiming that spending on loved ones is a priority.

“Our most recent numbers for the Thanksgiving-Black Friday weekend show that consumers are willing to spend. So we have a pretty robust feeling going into the holidays that consumers are going to reach into their pockets,” Mathews said.

“The U.S. consumer has \$3 trillion more in their bank accounts than they did pre-pandemic, and every single category of household income is up,” he continued. “The sense is that they’re pockets of the economy and pockets of the consumer that are absolutely struggling. But when you look at it on an aggregate basis, the consumer still has firepower to continue to spend.”

While shoppers are reportedly ready to dip into their pocketbooks for the 2023 holiday season, the retail expert noted there are still “major” concerns swirling around the sector including sales volume, theft, interest rates and credit card delinquencies.

“What we’re really seeing in terms of any weakness out there is being driven honestly in part by the fact that in retail we are seeing disinflationary, if not deflationary, prices over the last few months,” Mathews said.

“Three-percent inflation, we have to understand, is an aggregated number across everything. When you look at, actually, individual goods, if you look at mobile phones, for example, down 12% year-over-year, televisions down 10%,” he explained. “We’re also seeing home furnishings down both month-over-month and year-over-year. So there are sectors where we see real weakness in price. And that, to some extent, is driving the reduction in sales that we’re seeing.”

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Additionally, a survey from Clever recently unveiled that 61% of Americans have credit card debt today, owing an average of \$5,875. NRF's resident data expert claimed while debt levels are "incredibly high," service debt is manageable and has been rising.

"That's your ability to pay the interest on your debt. And that has been rising, but it's in line with where we were pre-pandemic. So, even though gross debt levels are rising, and credit card debt levels are rising, we are still in a position because of interest rates. Much of this debt was acquired during a low-interest rate period," he explained. "Consumers still have the ability to pay off that debt."

"There's a lot of different factors that sort of interplay against each other. I'm not diminishing the concerns of a crisis of credit card debt," Mathews added, "but I do think that we are not yet in a position where we see that as a threat to performance."

One area where retail experts remain "incredibly concerned" is retail theft and loss. Mathews spotlighted that it isn't only industry giants seeing store closures, but small businesses as well.

"We hear about the big chains and their problems. Oftentimes, we forget that the retail industry is an industry that is made up of 98% of small businesses. That is the backbone of our economy. And sometimes those get forgotten, and they know they're suffering as well," the NRF director of research said.

Large-scale organized theft operations don't happen in every market, but Mathews warned that criminals know their limits when stealing and reselling products.

"They need to steal stuff that is easy to move, easy to sell, and that has high resale value. So there are certain types of products that they're targeting, certain types of stores that they're targeting and certain cities that they're targeting because they know that some states have a \$1,000 threshold, so they can steal up to \$990," he said.

"There are a lot of different policy measures that we're working on, a lot of effort working with people on Capitol Hill to make sure that is something that's addressed," Mathews continued, "because it's far from ideal for a retailer to have to put half of their products behind plastic barriers. Only does that make it less convenient for the consumer."

In preparation for Black Friday shopping, Mathews also shut down any speculation that there's an excess of inventory at big-box retailers ahead of the busy season.

"I think [the media is] just concerned that we're seeing a bit of a slowdown, and that means that there's going to be too much inventory, which means that retailers are going to have to be very promotional and reduce prices. None of us have crystal balls. We'll know better in January."



# How to Make and Keep Your New Year's Resolutions



The new year is nearly upon us as the holiday season is in full swing. That means... it is time to focus on our New Year's resolutions!

The start of a new year is the perfect time to turn a new page, which is probably why so many people make New Year's resolutions. The new year often feels like a fresh start and a great opportunity to change bad habits and establish new routines that will help you grow psychologically, emotionally, socially, physically, or intellectually.

Of course, resolutions are much easier to make than to keep, and by the end of March, many of us have abandoned our resolve and settled back into our old patterns.<sup>1</sup> Part of the problem may be that we do not know how to keep New Year's resolutions, despite our good intentions.

## Why We Make Resolutions

Why do millions of people resolve to change at the beginning of every year? A series of studies into what researchers have dubbed the "fresh start effect" has looked at how temporal landmarks can motivate aspirational behaviors.

The new year feels like a new beginning, which is why so many people often set lofty resolutions during these times. While this practice can sometimes lead people to bite off more than they can chew, going after resolutions can also present great opportunities to overcome struggles with willpower, determination, and ingenuity.

Perceptions of the success of these resolutions vary. In one study, only around 12% of people who make New Year's resolutions felt that they were successful in achieving their goals.<sup>3</sup> Some of the most common resolutions include:

- Losing weight
- Sticking to a healthier diet
- Exercising regularly
- Making better financial choices
- Quitting smoking
- Spending more time with family
- and more

While many people feel that they don't achieve their resolution goals, one study showed that those who set New Year's resolutions are 10 times more likely to actually change their behavior than people who don't make these yearly goals.

So how long do resolutions last? While most surveys suggest that the majority of people don't stick with their New Year's resolutions for long, one 2020 study found that 55% of participants considered themselves successful at sustaining resolutions after a year.

In that study, researchers found that people were more successful at keeping approach-oriented goals (such as changing eating or sleeping habits) rather than avoidance-oriented ones (which are motivated by a desire to avoid something).

Even if resolutions don't always stick, that doesn't mean that resolutions aren't worth making. One survey conducted by YouGov found that people who planned to make New Year's resolutions were more optimistic about the future.

So, what can you do to make it more likely that you will keep your next resolution? The following tips may help you beat the odds.

## Choose a Specific Goal

Every year, millions of adults resolve to "lose weight," "be more productive," or "get in shape" during the next year.<sup>1</sup> Instead of selecting such an ambiguous goal, focus on something more concrete that you can realistically set your sights on. In other words, choose a very specific, achievable goal.

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For example, you might commit to losing 10 pounds, making daily to-do lists, or running a half-marathon. Be sure to make your goal realistic rather than drastic. Choosing a concrete, achievable goal also gives you the opportunity to plan exactly how you are going to accomplish (and stick to) your goal over the course of the year.

**Limit Your Resolutions**

While you might have a long list of potential New Year's resolutions, Richard Wiseman, a professor of psychology at Hertfordshire University, suggests that you pick just one and focus your energies on it rather than spreading yourself too thin among a number of different objectives.

Taking on too much all at once can be daunting. It can be particularly difficult because establishing new behavioral patterns takes time and sustained effort. Focusing on one specific goal makes keeping a resolution much more achievable. Focus on ONE goal at a time!

**Put Time into Planning**

Don't wait until the last minute to choose your goal. Picking wisely and putting in extensive planning are essential parts of achieving any goal. Experts suggest that you brainstorm how you will tackle a major behavior change, including the steps you will take, why you want to do it, and ways you can keep yourself on track.

You can start by writing down your goal, making a list of things you might do to achieve that goal, and noting any obstacles that might stand in your way. By knowing exactly what you want to accomplish and the difficulties you might face, you'll be better prepared to stick to your resolution and overcome anything that might sidetrack you. You *must* plan ahead as life can happen, and things can derail you from achieving your goals.

**Start With Small Steps**

Taking on too much too quickly is a common reason why so many New Year's resolutions fail. Starting an unsustainably restrictive diet, overdoing it at the gym, or radically altering your normal behavior are surefire ways to derail your plans. Instead, focus on taking tiny steps that will ultimately help you reach your larger goal.

While it may seem like a slow start, these small incremental changes make it easier to stick to your new healthy habits and increase the likelihood of long-term success.

**Avoid Repeating Past Failures**

Another strategy for keeping your New Year's resolution is to not make the exact same resolution year after year. "If people think they can do it, they probably can, but if they've already tried and failed, their self-belief will be low," Wiseman explained in an interview with *The Guardian*.

If you do choose to reach for the same goals you've tried for in the past, spend some time evaluating your previous results. Which strategies were the most effective? Which were the least effective? What has prevented you from keeping your resolution in past years?

Consider altering your resolution slightly to make it more feasible. By changing your approach, you will be more likely to see real results this year.

**Remember That Change Is a Process**

Those unhealthy or undesired habits that you are trying to change probably took years to develop, so how can you expect to change them in just a matter of days, weeks, or months? Be patient with yourself. Understand that working toward your resolution is a process. Even if you make a misstep or two, you can restart and continue on your journey towards your goal.

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**CONTINUED****Get Support**

Yes, you've probably heard this advice a million times, but that is because the buddy system actually works. Having a solid support system can help you stay motivated and accountable.<sup>8</sup> Camaraderie makes sticking to your resolution more fun, too. So, ideally, find a like-minded pal or loved one to join you in your goal.

Explain what your goals are to your close friends or family and ask them to help you achieve your objectives. Better yet, enlist the help of others by joining a group that shares your goal.

**Renew Your Motivation**

During the first days of a New Year's resolution, you will probably feel confident and highly motivated to reach your goal. Because you haven't really faced any discomfort or temptation associated with changing your behavior, making this change might seem all too easy.

After dealing with the reality of dragging yourself to the gym at 6 a.m. or gritting your teeth through headaches brought on by nicotine withdrawal, your motivation to keep your New Year's resolution may start to dwindle. When you face such moments, remind yourself exactly why you are doing this. Think about (or write a list to keep handy) what do you have to gain by achieving your goal. Finding sources of inspiration can keep you going when times get tough.

**Keep Working on Your Goals**

By March, many people have lost that initial spark of motivation that they had in January. Keep that inspiration alive by continuing to work on your goals, even after facing setbacks. If your current approach is not working, reevaluate your strategies, and develop a new plan. Being flexible with your plan—and even your end goal—will help you be successful.

Keep a Resolution Journal—Consider keeping a resolution journal, where you can write about your successes and struggles. Write down the reasons why you are working toward your goal so that you can refer to them during times when you feel uninspired and unmotivated. Think about what is causing you to falter (such as stress from work or home life) and how to cope effectively.

By sticking with it and working on your goal all year long, you can be one of the few able to say that you really did keep your New Year's resolution—and if you're writing down your progress and strategies, you'll have ready proof of your efforts if you're ever feeling like giving up.

**Learn and Adapt**

Encountering a setback is one of the most common reasons why people give up on their New Year's resolutions. If you suddenly relapse into a bad habit, don't view it as a failure. The path toward your goal is not always a straight one, and there will often be challenges along the way.<sup>9</sup> Instead, view relapses as learning opportunities.

If you are keeping a resolution journal, write down important information about when the relapse occurred, what might have triggered it, and what you might do differently next time. By understanding the challenges you face, you will be better prepared to deal with them in the future.

The yearly ritual of resolution setting does not have to be a yearly disappointment. Sometimes, the difference between success and failure is simply choosing the right goal and the process you use to go about achieving it.

Most importantly, remember to be kind and flexible with yourself and to celebrate any and all progress along the way. It's not just the end goal that matters—it's the journey along the way.



# Scientists Say You Should Run in the Cold Weather



It's good news for runners this winter season—running in the cold weather is actually really good for you, experts have said.

Scientists at the Midwest Orthopaedics at RUSH have revealed five reasons why running in chilly temperatures can actually be highly beneficial.

"Cold weather doesn't have to force runners indoors and I encourage my patients to continue safely running outdoors," Dr. Joshua Blomgren, Midwest Orthopaedics at RUSH, and Aid Station Medical Captain for the Chicago Marathon said in a recent statement. "Exercise is medicine, even in the winter."

Experts do say, however, it is not recommended to run in subzero temperatures, and those running in the cold should take precautions and dress in appropriate layers.

## Running in the Cold Is Easier

Although the prospect of a run may seem less appealing in the cold, the physical act of running is actually a lot easier when temperatures are low. In fact, cold weather is actually ideal for long distance running.

The warmer the weather, the more exertion on the body. High temperatures can also increase cardiovascular and metabolic strain on the body while running.

Running in the heat can also cause wet heat loss—when your body releases heat by sweating—and dry heat loss—when the heat is released into the air, according to Women's Running magazine. Blood flow therefore will be concentrated on cooling the body rather than moving the muscles. This makes the act of running feel infinitely more difficult.

## Cold Running Boosts Your Metabolism

Running in the cold can actually help boost your metabolism, scientists state. The metabolism slows down to preserve fat when a person is not exercising. But exposing the body to cold weather actually tricks the metabolism into working more quickly. This means that running in the cold can actually help a person lose more weight than if they were to run exclusively in the heat.

## It Helps Your Mood

It's no secret that cold, dark weather can cause low mood, or Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Exercise in any form increases serotonin and endorphins in the body, meaning it can help combat this.

SAD can also be caused by the lack of sunlight in the winter—running outside may allow the body more time to soak in the daylight throughout the day.

## Running in the Cold May Burn More Calories

Running will help maintain a healthy weight in winter, especially during the festive season. Previous research has already shown that it is a great form of exercise for burning calories and can also lead to a longer life. Runners have a 25 to 40 percent reduced risk of dying young, according to Progress in Cardiovascular Diseases.

## Converts Fat in the Body

The body carries all different kinds of fat, the main two being brown and white. White fat is usually unwanted, while brown fat is made up of metabolic tissue which helps to burn calories. Exposing the body to cold temperatures can actually help convert this unwanted white fat into brown fat.

So, put on your running shoes and hit that cold pavement!

# Keeping Your Gift Spending Within Budget this Christmas



If you want to keep rocking around the Christmas tree without racking up the Christmas debt and headache, be more thoughtful in your spending and saving this season! How, you may ask? These are the top 25 answers for you keep your gift spending within your budget.

## Develop a gift-giving philosophy.

Normally, our first suggestion in every instance of life is to budget. And we'll get there. But before you budget, our very first Christmas tip is this: You've got to create your Christmas gift-giving philosophy.

What does giving mean to you? Is it about finding the perfect presents? Do you hope to impress others with how much you spend on them? Or do you feel obligated to buy for people? These motivations (and others like them) can really shape how you view the season. Be honest with yourself and think about *why* you're buying presents before you think about how you're going to pay for them all.

## Track your spending.

So, lots of people spend like crazy throughout December and never check in on their budget. They just think, *I'll worry about it in January*. Future you has some advice here: Don't. Do. That. Track your expenses as you go so you don't end up overspending and ruining this month's *and* next month's budget.

## Rein in other spending.

First of all, don't spend outside of your comfort zone this season or any season. But what about the money you do need for Christmas? If you've been shopping all year or stashing cash into your Christmas sinking fund, you might be set. But if not, you'll have to find that money somewhere else. The first step here is to move money around in your budget—spending less on some categories in December to make up for the extra Christmas celebrations.

## Choose time over money.

There's an old saying that goes, "It's the thought that counts." For some people, the thought of spending time together really is better than the joy of a physical gift. You can save money this year by being intentional about being together—in whatever way you can, whether that's in person or virtually. This year, value experiences over accessories and conversations over clutter.

## Shop early.

Don't wait for Black Friday to start Christmas shopping—look for sales all year long. Grab that stuffed Sasquatch on clearance in July for your bigfoot-loving nephew. When you're mindful of your list throughout the year, you'll spread out both the spending and the stress (and maybe even get rid of the stress altogether).

If you missed the chance to jump on the early shopping train this year, remember it in January when you're budgeting for the *next* Christmas season!

## Give fewer gifts.

As you're in the spirit of trimming the tree, trim down that Christmas list while you're at it. Of course, you do have a bit of holiday-induced obligation to deal with. Not everyone needs a gift—this year, send your tidings of comfort and joy to some people on your list through a thoughtful card.

And if you want to save even more money, have a kind chat with your family members. Are you all giving just to give? Do you all want to cut back? A clear conversation about skipping presents this year for a shared meal (if you're able) and stocking stuffers instead could be just the thing both your family and your finances need.



**CONTINUED****Resist retail marketing.**

Friends. Americans spent \$936.3 billion on the holidays last year.<sup>1</sup> That's a lot.

Don't let yourself get wrapped up in all the sales and spending. You may think these retailers are posting deals from the goodness of their hearts to help you—but their real goal is to get in on a part of that \$936 billion holiday “magic.” Stick with your budget—and shop wisely.

**Use old gift cards.**

Think about all the money you have left on old gift cards, as well as the cards you'll never use because they're to places you never shop, eat or visit. Consider the partial cards as discounts and use them to buy presents. Regift (which is not a dirty word, as we'll explain later) the other cards to people who'll appreciate them. Don't let those little pieces of plastic go to waste this Christmas!

**Order online early.**

Ordering online means shopping from the convenience of your very own couch as you roast chestnuts on an open fire. That's the kind of multitasking we're all about. Cross-check the price on that plush puppy across multiple stores without ever putting on real pants.

But make sure you do this early enough to get the cheapest online shipping options—and remember shipping is taking way longer this year. The last thing you need is a budget ruined by all those additional rush order costs.

**Combine your orders.**

Speaking of shipping, plenty of stores offer it free of charge if you spend a minimum amount. So, do that! If you see the perfect superhero-themed sweatshirt you know your dad would love, but you're below the minimum amount for free shipping, keep shopping inside that store. Is there anything for your brother or cousin on that same website? Don't buy just to buy—but be thoughtful and combine orders to lower shipping costs.

**Live by the list.**

There's a reason Santa checked his list twice, and it's not because he's absent-minded. When we go off the list, we overspend. Now, if you realize you forgot a friend, of course you add them in! But once you've got your philosophy and budget set, don't get swept up in the Christmas spirit and start buying every snowflake-themed item you find for every person you've ever met.

**Say no to random gift exchanges.**

Here's a hot Christmas tip: Put an end to the white elephant or junk-for-junk gift exchanges at your work, small group or book club. Christmas is expensive enough without these social pressures. Be kind, but just say no (thank you).

**Regift.**

Regifting has a bad reputation, but it's time to move away from that. Maybe you should say you're working in the “present relocation program.” It isn't catchy—we'll work on the title while *you* work on the concept.

Seriously, it's okay to regift! But there are ground rules. You don't want to hand Dad the motivational poster your great-aunt gave you. Mostly because she's his aunt too. But the brand-new slow cooker your well-meaning in-laws gave you when you already have two could easily be regifted to your newlywed bestie.

**Make presents.**

If you want to give something personal, memorable and one of a kind, make it! Seriously. Pinterest has a ton of ideas and instructions. If you aren't super crafty, try baking a sweet treat, putting together a gift basket of someone's favorite things, or whipping up some DIY sugar scrubs. Nothing says Happy Christmas like something homemade.

**Don't shop at the mall.**

Avoiding the mall means also avoiding every single pushy kiosk salesperson. Plus, you won't have to worry about the millions of distractions, including (but not limited to) creepy mall Santa, the delicious scents of cinnamon-sugar pretzels, and all those tempting retail window displays. Oh, and the parking lot jams. And the crazy crowds. Save money, stress and time—don't go to the mall.

Happy holidays *and* savings!

# *How to Beat the Winter Blues--and get better sleep*



They are not called winter blues for no reason. Seasonal affective disorder affects an estimated 10 million Americans and is four times more common in women than in men, studies show. But SAD is not only linked to a drop in energy level or fatigue. Research has also shown it can severely affect sleep, including a tendency to oversleep or sleep fewer hours a night, and this could affect one's quality of life.

## **Learning From The Past**

A new study revealed that winter blues are not a recent phenomenon. It explored sleep from a one-year diary from the mid-18th century, documenting the diarist's sleep and naps, activities, food intake, urine volume and meteorological data daily. According to the results, time spent in bed was subject to strong seasonal variations.

For example, bedtime and rise time were earlier in summer than in winter, and sleep latency (the time it usually takes a person to fall asleep after turning the lights out) was shorter during the summer than in winter. While these results may prompt a more detailed investigation of the variability of sleep behavior in the pre-industrial period, they confirmed the profound effect of winter blues on sleep. Moreover, the study gives us a personal view of sleep health and provides clues for sleep health today. Here are three ways to get the best rest this winter.

## **Engage In Exercise, Even When You Cannot Sleep**

While studies have suggested that any exercise just before bedtime or during the night is unhelpful, science has also shown that certain exercises like journaling, yoga/meditation and light stretching at those times may help us fall back asleep. It's just how and what exercises we do and what works best for our bodies.

Even doing low-impact chores at a relaxed pace (folding clothes, picking up clutter, etc.) or a fun low-impact workout may help you fall asleep. As the 2022 documentary film [The Quest for Sleep](#) noted, we need sleep to survive, rebuild mind and body at night, and keep us healthy throughout our lives.

## **Invest In Essential Oils—And Create A Cozy Ambience**

Aromatherapy essential oils may help people with dementia and arthritis, as well as respiratory diseases, blood pressure, and skin changes. But its positive effects on sleep cannot be ignored.

Cedarwood, for example, can help with calming down, stress relief, restful sleep and clear airways, while lavender can also increase restful sleep and improve mood. Individuals may apply oils to pulse points, use aroma sprays or potpourri, or add essential oils to flowers.

## **Embrace A Pro-Sleep Routine—Creativity Is Key**

Having a sleep routine is becoming increasingly beneficial. For some, this can be a game-changer and a great way to manage insomnia and sleep apnea and improve sleep. Sleep routine is unique to the individual, so these tips can inspire you to create a sleep routine or improve your current one. They include:

- Playing calming and soothing music or sounds
- Having a pitch-black room with complete silence
- Using a blue light glasses when looking at screens
- Using scented candles or becoming a fragrant plant parent
- Using a white noise machine each night or when necessary
- Consulting your doctor about natural wellness options like supplements, vitamins/minerals and herbal medicines

Here's to a happy winter and healthier sleep!

## *The True Spirit of the Holidays--Giving is better than getting!*



It's the most wonderful time of the year! Families are frantically preparing for grand feasts, shopping for presents, and pulling out their long-sealed bins of decorating supplies. The holidays are about sharing, caring, and spreading joy—not just for your family, but for others. By volunteering and donating, you can brighten people's holiday season and transform the world into a better, happier place.

Here's the importance of giving back during the holiday season.

### **Spread the Cheer**

It feels great when you're able to bring a big, bright smile to someone's face. That's the entire point of the holiday season, right? You can brighten a child's day by donating a heap of presents to Toys for Tots. Not everyone can afford to buy their children presents, and some children don't have the luxury of a family at all. Make their holiday season special by giving them something to unwrap on Christmas morning.

Grab your favorite pen and a piece of stationary and get writing. Send simple, touching letters to people in hospitals and nursing homes. Ordering something at a coffee shop or buying groceries at your local supermarket? Offer to pay for the person behind you. For some people, the holiday season is a lonely, stressful time. With these small but meaningful actions, you can instantly improve their day.



### **Help Those in Need**

When you're out looking for gifts, think carefully. Do the items you're buying give back to a small business or charitable organization, or a multi-million-dollar corporation? Try to buy from organizations that support good, charitable causes—whether it's helping endangered animals, supporting the homeless, or improving the living conditions of families in high-poverty areas.

Remember that not everyone has the luxury of a nice, homemade meal, a warm bed to sleep on, or the money to buy their children gifts. By helping these organizations, you're not just getting what you need—you're helping another family get what they need, too.

### **Support Your Community**

Most presents are bought from well-known retailers like Target, Walmart, and Amazon. However, buying from local, family-owned businesses strengthens your local economy. It guarantees your hard-earning money is going to other members of your community, rather than being pocketed by rich executives.

Support freelancers, too. By purchasing their products, you're showing them that their talents have value, and that their hard and tireless work is paying off. You can get hand-knitted blankets, a custom-made drawing, handmade soap, and more.

### **Improve Your Wellbeing**

The importance of giving back during the holiday season is evident in the way it affects others—but what about how it affects you?

Volunteers report having better health, self-esteem, and personal satisfaction than non-volunteers. When you're helping those in need, it's easy to feel good about yourself. Volunteering stimulates feelings of euphoria and promotes the release of endorphins, which can give your self-esteem a much-needed boost.

Make it a great holiday season by giving back this year!



## Welcome one of our credit union partners!

As a nonprofit consumer education organization, ACC has developed partnerships with credit unions across the country. These partnerships allow ACC members eligibility with our credit unions. If approved, our members gain access to a member-owned financial institution, with products and services designed to make banking more affordable, simple and convenient, and to offer additional resources that can help our members identify and achieve their financial dreams.

Texans Credit Union  
777 E Campbell Rd,  
Richardson, TX 75081  
+++



### Humble Beginnings

In 1953, 11 Texas Instruments employees pooled five dollars each and petitioned the Texas Banking Commission to establish an organization that would promote thrift and provide low-cost loans to TI employees. Soon after, a charter was granted by the State of Texas and Texins Credit Union was born. Just three months later, membership had grown to over 267 and assets totaled \$6,855.73. A tradition of excellence had begun.

For nearly 40 years, Texins served only Texas Instruments employees. Then, in 1991, Texins expanded its field of membership to include employees at select businesses outside of TI. In 1998, Texins Credit Union expanded once again to adopt a community charter, allowing it to offer membership to citizens in surrounding communities. That same year, members voted to change the name from Texins to Texans to better reflect the diversity of this expanded field of membership.

Today, Texans provide a full suite of financial products and services to more than 120,000 members. Membership spans seven counties and serves the employees of over 100 select businesses. The Credit Union operates 11 branches and currently manages over \$2.1 billion in assets.

### Texans Serving Texans

Since the granting of its charter in 1953, Texans Credit Union has been an organization powered by Texans, for Texans. Texans' mission is not only to improve the economic well-being of its members, but to improve the well-being of the communities it serves.

Because personal financial responsibility begins at a young age, Texans actively promotes financial literacy programs among its youth membership, as well as within the community. The \$avar Kids Club uses prize incentives to promote good saving habits in young members. Texans believes that building a strong financial foundation through education will foster healthy financial choices in adulthood.

### Looking to the Future

Stemming from a company in which technological advancement and progress are paramount, Texans Credit Union is in a constant state of growth within the financial industry. Through new products and services and more advanced technology, Texans aspire, above all else, to serve its members more effectively every day. Texans' focus is to provide members with every convenience while still providing a consummate standard of undivided personal attention and service.

Built on the foundation of superior member service, Texans has upheld this philosophy for over 60 years. Texans strive for complete member satisfaction by operating with the utmost integrity, respect and accountability, not only to its members, but within the credit union itself.

### Why Texans Credit Union

Here, you're more than a member. You're a Texan. Being a Texan comes with a feeling of pride, respect, hard work, and dedication to making the lives around us better. Our commitment to you is to reinforce that feeling with every interaction. We're proud to be Texans and we want you to be too.

Once you join, you're a member for life, regardless of where you live, work or go to school after membership is established. Membership at Texans Credit Union is open to:

- Individuals who live, work, or attend school in the Texas counties of Collin, Cooke, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Fannin, Fort Bend, Grayson, Harris, Hunt, Kaufman, Rockwall, Tarrant, Travis, and Williamson.
- Employees who work for a Texans Preferred Business within one of the above counties.
- Immediate family of a current Texans Credit Union member or of an individual who is eligible for membership by the above standards.

For more information, visit our website at [www.texanscu.com](http://www.texanscu.com) or call us toll-free at (800)843-5295 today!

## Welcome one of our credit union partners!

As a nonprofit consumer education organization, ACC has developed partnerships with credit unions across the country. These partnerships allow ACC members eligibility with our credit unions. If approved, our members gain access to a member-owned financial institution, with products and services designed to make banking more affordable, simple and convenient, and to offer additional resources that can help our members identify and achieve their financial dreams.

Empower Federal Credit Union

515 Erie Blvd W,  
Syracuse, NY 13204

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**Get more out of your money, and every life moment.**



From the beginning, we've had one mission - to help our members reach their goals.

### About Us

Empower Federal Credit Union is a full-service financial institution that provides checking and savings accounts, loans, and other financial products to members in Central New York and in eight counties in New York State. As a credit union, Empower is a not-for-profit financial cooperative and our members are all part-owners.

Empower FCU was created in 2007 in a merger of equals between Power Federal Credit Union and Empire Federal Credit Union. Power was founded in 1939 by nine employees of what was then CNY Power Corporation/Niagara Mohawk (currently National Grid). Empire was established in 1950 as Syracuse District Telephone Employees Federal Credit Union, by employees of the Syracuse office of the New York Telephone Company. Several other credit unions also have merged with us throughout our history.

### Philosophy

We strive to build a relationship with each individual member and create lifelong financial partnerships. Whether a member walks through the door of one of our many **branch locations**, visits us online, or calls on the phone - we remember that everyone has a story, and every story is unique. We understand this and make it personal.

When interacting with our friendly, professional staff, members are treated as individuals and not just account numbers or credit scores. We seek to identify each individual's financial goals and assist them in pursuing their objectives by offering the products and services that best suit their needs.

We are out in the community serving our members and member companies that offer credit union membership to employees as a part of their benefits package. We volunteer, make donations, and sponsor events throughout the areas that we serve. Empower is proud to be among the top large employers in the state, according to the New York State Society for Human Resource Management's annual Best Companies to Work for in New York State awards program.

### We look forward to welcoming you to our financial family.

It's easy to list the benefits of joining Empower Federal Credit Union. You (or your business) will profit from lower loan rates, higher dividends on deposit accounts, first-class investing and insurance services, cutting-edge Online and Mobile Banking tools, and financial education resources that can help you make better decisions with your money. So the answer to, "Should you join?" is a resounding "yes."

### Our mission is to be a positive force in the places where we do business.

At Empower, community is at the core of everything we do. We are committed to uplifting the areas we serve through volunteer efforts, donations and event sponsorships. Our passion lies in making a meaningful impact, and we are continuously expanding our involvement to help create a better, brighter future for all.

For more information, visit our website at [www.empowerfcu.com](http://www.empowerfcu.com) or call us toll-free at **(800) 462-5000** today!

# ACC Wrap Up

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN CONSUMER COUNCIL



## Green C Certification

If your company or organization would like to increase its credibility with consumers, you should consider applying for ACC's **"Green C" Certification**.

*Application for the Fall cycle are being accepted through February 24th, 2024.*

It's a proven fact that consumers prefer to do business with eco-friendly companies, implement green initiatives and that practice Corporate Social Responsibility. The process is straight-forward, and all applicants are recognized by the ACC and the Green USA Institute.

All applicants should review the criteria, then complete and submit their applications to ACC's Green Consumer Council for review, assessment and feedback. Program details and the Green C Certification criteria can be viewed online at [www.AmericanConsumerCouncil.org/education](http://www.AmericanConsumerCouncil.org/education).

For more information, call 1-800-544-0414 or visit ACC's website.

## Friend of the Consumer

Is your business consumer-friendly?

Does your business deserve greater recognition for its service to consumers?

If so, you should apply for the American Consumer Council's Friend of the Consumer Award.



Each year, ACC awards numerous "Friend of the Consumer" awards to deserving manufacturers, retailers, and other businesses that produce or sell products in the United States, and which meet or exceed federally mandated standards, and have "demonstrated a commitment to American consumers by providing products or services that foster consumer confidence and market acceptance."

To apply, complete the online application at: [www.americanconsumercouncil.org/awards.asp](http://www.americanconsumercouncil.org/awards.asp) and return it to ACC with the application fee.

Applicants will be notified within five days of receipt of their application. Thereafter, a panel of independent judges will review your application and make a formal recommendation within 20 days of your submission.



## Financial Education

ACC is pleased to have a partnership with Nicole Middendorf. Nicole is a money maven, a knowledge junkie, and a born coach. She is an entrepreneur who left Morgan Stanley in 2003 to run her own wealth management firm. Nicole is the author of five books, a world traveler, philanthropist, and an accomplished public speaker.

As a Wealth Advisor and Certified Divorce Financial Analyst with Prosperwell Financial, her main focus is to help people create wealth from the inside out. She is able to accomplish this through one-on-one client meetings, writing books, presenting at conferences, and appearing on TV, radio, and other media.

Nicole shares financial advice and a real-life perspective on saving, planning, and investing with audiences across the country. Her primary goal is to take complicated subjects and make them easy to understand. She works hard to empower her audience to make crucial and positive changes in their own lives. Nicole's books have received local and national press coverage, where she has become known for her thoughtful concise quotes, relaxed on-air presence, and articulate delivery.

ACC is committed to promoting and providing financial education to the public. Nicole Middendorf has collaborated with us to create a new 6-part video series that promotes financial literacy for youth. Check it out here: <https://qcashfinancial.com/are-we-failing-our-kids-in-financial-literacy/>

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