Answers to Members’ Financial Questions

The warmer days of summer are finally here! While the pace of life may shift with the seasons, one thing that remains constant is Greylock’s focus on financial literacy. I know that our Members are always looking for ways to enhance their financial knowledge and awareness. With this in mind, here are some questions we have heard from our Members, along with my responses. Let me know what you think!

Q: I’ve been struggling to save money. Do you have any good tips?
A: The most effective strategy I have found is to pay yourself first. What does that take? The first step is to open a savings account and set aside some funds, even a small amount to get started. Then set up automatic transfers from each paycheck to your savings account. Small, consistent amounts will build up over time and provide a financial cushion. Always know that our certified financial coaches can help you develop a spending and savings plan that works for you. To learn more or to set up an appointment, call 413-344-1026.

Q: Every time I watch the news, there’s talk about a new fraud or scam. What can I do to protect myself?
A: Fraud affects us all, including my own family. In those situations, I have observed that some people avoid getting help when they are scammed because of embarrassment. Please don’t let that prevent you from getting help. To stay protected, monitor your transactions by regularly reviewing your member statements and other financial documents. Pay close attention to any unauthorized charges or errors, and obtain a free copy of your credit report each year. You can do so by visiting www.annualcreditreport.com, which is the only website authorized by the federal government to issue free annual credit reports from the three credit reporting agencies (Experian, Equifax, and TransUnion) or call 1-877-322-8228. Please be sure to report any discrepancies immediately. Remember, if someone makes an offer that sounds too good to be true, it probably is! Greylock has a host of fraud prevention resources and tips available here https://www.greylock.org/fraud-prevention.html.

Q: I feel like my personal debt is growing out of control and I don’t know what to do about it. Do you have any suggestions?
A: A good place to start is to focus on paying down high-interest debt, such as credit card balances. Pay more than the minimum payment, if possible, to reduce interest costs and work down the size of your total debt. For more help, call us at 413-344-1026 to set up an appointment with one of our certified financial coaches.

Q: What are the differences between a debit card and a credit card?
A: When you use a debit card to make a purchase, the amount is deducted directly from your checking account. However, with a credit card, it’s essentially a loan that must be paid later. Also, debit card purchases don’t accrue interest charges, but with credit cards, interest is charged on balances not paid in full by a required date.

To learn more about any of these topics or to make an appointment with one of our certified financial coaches, please contact Greylock’s Community Empowerment Center at 413-344-1026 or www.greylock.org/cec. Have a great summer!

Sincerely,

John L. Bissell
President and Chief Executive Officer
The moment I truly understood financial literacy

By Maria Hester

When I was 5 years old, my mom opened my first savings account for me at our local bank. Growing up I watched my mom clip coupons regularly, only to still spend $400 on groceries every week and $1,000 on back-to-school shopping. As the youngest of seven kids, if we wanted something that was not a necessity, it came out of one of our bank accounts.

At 13 years old, my mom went with me to open my first CD with money accumulated from babysitting and refereeing soccer games. I had no idea what I was doing, only that she told me it would benefit me in the future. The teller discussed the CD options that would best suit my needs. However, I must admit, I was lost. The concepts went over my head and I needed it explained several times. The terminology included words that I had never heard of before. I had no idea what APY (annual percentage yield) stood for. I was never good at math, so looking at all the numbers on a sheet of paper was intimidating. At the time I picked what my mom recommended, and I am grateful she always had my best interest in mind. But truthfully, I remained confused for years when it came to financial literacy.

It was not until my first year of college that my personal finance professor took the time in class to explain everything to us, including some of my classmates who never even had a bank account. When I finally realized what the numbers meant, I felt foolish. How could I have not known what APY represented for so long without asking for clarification? I am convinced that at 13 years old, I simply was not interested and did not pay attention. When it was being explained, I was distracted. I had the security of knowing my mom would do what was best for me.

Looking back, I now understand how opening a CD has benefited me, especially as a recent college graduate navigating financial life in the real world. Getting educated is the first step to financial literacy. Knowing and understanding your options is important to starting your financial journey. That could include opening a savings account or checking account, or even, a CD. Reviewing and understanding interest rates and APY is an important aspect of the process.

Prior to my college graduation this past June, I wanted to secure an internship with an institution that spoke to my values. I am from a small town with a large family and Greylock stood out to me because of all they do to help their community. It had a close, small-town feel in a more populated area. Greylock's company culture was different from everywhere else I looked. The credit union includes people who are genuinely kind and caring and that is clear through the information reflected on their website and videos on their YouTube channel. The culture is the same internally as it is externally, and that is rare to find.

Greylock has classes at its Community Empowerment Center specifically designed to educate people at various levels of financial literacy. There is a combination of in-person and online classes available for all levels of comfortability.

Either intentionally, or unintentionally, my mom taught us the importance of saving and budgeting from an early age. I am privileged to have received this guidance, knowing that not everyone has that opportunity. Regardless of age, upbringing or background, money never goes away, and it is important to know how to use it and save it wisely.

Maria Hester is an intern with the Greylock Marketing Department. She graduated from Central Connecticut State University this past May.

Greylock now has 11 Video Teller Service (VTS) machines throughout Berkshire and Columbia counties. Video Teller Services are available Monday - Friday, 7:30a.m. - 6p.m. and Saturday, 11a.m. - 3p.m.

To get started, just tap the screen to access a live teller, where you can make any of the following transactions:

- Deposit checks or cash without the longer holds of a regular ATM
- Withdraw smaller or larger amounts than a regular ATM (From $1 to $2,500)
- Pay your Greylock loans
- Transfer money between your Greylock accounts
- Pay your Greylock credit card

When the lines are long in branch or in the drive up, skip the line and visit your nearest VTS. For a list of locations, visit www.Greylock.org/vts.
The Chairperson’s Corner

By Peter Lopez,
Board of Directors

A salute to the class of 2024 • Tutors, mentors, problem-solvers, and community builders.

Just a few of the many admirable roles that described the applicants of Greylock’s 2024 Community Enrichment Scholarship, of which 70 high school seniors from across Berkshire and Columbia counties submitted applications. The scholarship represents a $500 award to be applied toward tuition at a state or nationally accredited two- or four-year college or university. For more than a decade, Greylock has provided this scholarship to high school seniors.

On behalf of Greylock’s Board of Directors, it is my absolute honor to extend best wishes on their achievements. We’re proud to be their financial institution and we know that they’ll continue to accomplish amazing things in their journey ahead.

Congratulations to the Class of 2024!

In June, Greylock was pleased to announce the winners of Greylock’s 2024 Community Scholarship. They include the following students:

High School Seniors:
Meghan Schrade, BART Charter School
Tatum Ciempa, Drury High School
Michelle Wood, Drury High School
David Scholz, Hoosac Valley High School
Abigail Scialabba, Hoosac Valley High School
Kira Johnson, Lee High School
Cooper Maloney, Lee High School
Hannah Alsford, Lenox High School
Ian Bridges, Lenox High School
Amy Harrington, McCann Technical School
Joseph Roy, McCann Technical School
Rosaline Dohoney, Monument Mountain High School
Bryana Fransisco, Monument Mountain High School
Catherine Moriarty, Mount Greylock High School
Jamie Swenen, Mount Greylock High School
Janessa Jamross, Pittsfield High School
Abigail Malumphy, Pittsfield High School
Guage Statley, Taconic High School
Nevaeh Williams, Taconic High School
Alexandra Bills, Wahconah Regional High School
Aidan Garcia, Wahconah Regional High School
Fathima Chowdhury, Hudson High School
Carien Zietsman, Ichabod Crane High School

Vocational/Trade School Seniors:
Gavin Barnes, Taconic High School
Dylan Stetz, Taconic High School

Visit the Community Empowerment Center’s online calendar today for helpful, fun and educational events from Greylock and many of our partner organizations. Many of our programs are available in both English and Spanish.

www.Greylock.org/CEC

Here are some of our upcoming educational classes:

Presented in English:
Register at www.Greylock.org/CEC

Preparing for Future Homeownership
July 24, 5 - 6p.m.
via Zoom.

Be Mindful of Your Digital Money
August 8, Noon - 1p.m.
75 Kellogg Street.

Welcome to Scamalot!
(Protecting Yourself from Fraud & Scams)
September 7, 10 - 11a.m.
via Zoom.

Presentado en español:
(para inscribirse 413-236-4875)

Prepárate Para Comprar Una Casa
29 de Julio a las 5 - 6:30p.m.
Puede venir en persona a la 75 Kellogg Street o conectarse via Zoom.

Presupuesto Básico
17 de Agosto a las 10 - 11a.m.
Puede venir en persona a la 75 Kellogg Street o conectarse via Zoom.

The First 17 Years Are No Walk in the Park

The husband always said, “little kids, little problems.” From a financial perspective, I guess you could say the same.

We have talked in depth about paying college expenses, and now we are onto our first wedding, but there is much to pay for leading up to all of that. I really feel for the young families today that are just starting out. Stuff is so expensive. They say everything is relative, but oh my gosh, things must feel farther out of reach than ever today.

I remember a time when my siblings and I went to camp and played sports just to give my stay-at-home mom time to herself. In our household, both my husband and I had to work full-time to make ends meet. Daycare was a necessity and when they were school age, summer meant camps and/or childcare for all three kids. Those savings accounts paid for all of that and thank goodness we had them. As time went on, we faithfully continued to fund them and wanted to protect that money from everyday needs, which believe me, had we had access, we absolutely would have spent them! This banker mom had to be creative to make ends meet at times. I imagine there are a lot of families today in that same boat! That is why it is so important to pay yourself first from day one with any budget.

So, what did we do to protect that money from us? We connected with an investment guy and put that money to work in the stock market. We opened Uniform Transfer to Minors Act accounts (also known as UTMAs) that we invested in mutual funds. The rules for these accounts differ from state to state. To learn more about them, you must consult a licensed broker.

The important thing to know is that these funds were now out of sight, out of mind, and remained untouched for years. These investments made it possible for us to buy their first vehicles, pay their first and last month’s rent on their first apartments, and even furnish those apartments! It felt great to be able to do that for our kids and none of it would have been possible had we not put those funds to work in the stock market!

Growing up, my husband and I were the baby in each of our families. We always had our siblings’ hand-me-downs, which no doubt, has benefited our own kids in a BIG way, obviously! But our parent choices are not important, the power of “savings first” is. Save first, then find ways to put your savings to work for you so that you, too, will have the freedom to make your own crazy choices! It’s never too late to start.

Yours truly,

Jennifer Supranowicz “Banker Mom"