

Ambassador Courier

Upcoming Important Dates & Seminars

Monday, February 19

All locations will be closed in observance of Presidents' Day

Tuesday, February 27

Transitions to Retirement Virtual Seminar, 6pm

Tuesday, March 5

401k Rollover Planning Virtual Seminar, 6pm

Tuesday, March 19

Rethinking Diversification Virtual Seminar, 6pm

Register for upcoming virtual seminars on the events calendar at [firstffcu.com](https://www.firstffcu.com)



Essential Tips for Winterizing Your Finances

Now that we're past the holidays and into winter, it's crucial to prepare your finances. The cold months often bring unique financial challenges – such as higher heating bills and recovering from holiday expenses. Here are some essential tips to effectively winterize your finances for a stress-free season.

Preparing Your Home and Car for Winter

A key step in winterizing your finances involves ensuring your home is ready for the colder weather. This includes getting your furnace inspected by a professional to guarantee its efficiency, which can lead to significant savings on heating costs and help avoid expensive breakdowns. Additionally, changing your furnace filters regularly can reduce energy usage and wear on your HVAC system. Implementing smart adjustments, like setting a lower temperature on your thermostat during times you are away or asleep, can further reduce your heating bills by up to 10%. Keeping your gutters clean is also crucial this time of year.

Similarly, preparing your car for winter is essential. This includes checking the battery and engine coolant levels, ensuring your tires have sufficient tread for safe driving in snow and ice, and equipping your car with an emergency kit that includes jumper cables and an insulated blanket. A professional car inspection can also be beneficial for comprehensive winter readiness.

Financial Planning Post-Holidays

After the holiday season is a good time to review and adjust your budget for the immediate future and review your spending to even better prepare

for next year's expenses. It's also a good idea to consider implementing a no-spend month in the first quarter of the year, which can be an effective strategy to recuperate from holiday spending.

Anticipate higher costs in certain budget categories like heating, clothing, and gasoline through the winter months. To balance these increased expenses, it might be necessary to reduce spending in other areas. Utilizing digital resources such as our online budgeting tools available at [firstffcu.com](https://www.firstffcu.com), can help you manage your finances during the colder months – or even all year long!

Preparing for Emergencies

Having a well-established emergency fund is crucial for unforeseen expenses like car repairs or furnace replacements. First Financial provides various loan options, including personal loans, lines of credit, and home equity loans – which can offer support in emergencies.

Winterizing your finances involves a proactive and resourceful approach. By ensuring your home and car are prepared for winter, adjusting your budget accordingly, and being ready for emergencies – you can navigate the financial challenges of the colder months with confidence. Remember, First Financial is here to assist you with all your financial needs. Stay warm and financially secure this winter!

For more financial tips and resources, subscribe to our First Scoop blog at blog.firstffcu.com

Winter Greetings

Happy New Year 2024! We hope your new year is off to a great start, as we extend warm wishes to you and your family.

If your organization is planning an in-person or virtual event where informational materials will be presented or distributed, please let us know. Feel free to pass this email along to your employees, we are here to answer any questions they might have or provide financial advice when they need us!

If you're interested in bringing us to your school or business, contact business development at business@firstfcu.com.

We hope this new year is a prosperous one and thank you for being an Ambassador!

Sincerely,



Chantel Baptiste

Business Development Officer

Community Spotlight



This past fall, our team stayed connected with community partners at several of their benefits fairs. Let's take a look at where we've been over the last few months!

In October, we attended the Lakewood Township Benefits Fair, Ocean Township Annual Health Fair, Monmouth University Benefits Fair, and the Monmouth County Employees Financial Expo. We also shared digital marketing materials with CentraState Medical Center for their virtual Employee Benefits Fair.

In November, we ended the year by attending the Upper Freehold Regional School District Benefits Fair.

Meet Ameerah Jones, Owner of Hairstylist for the Nations in Shrewsbury, NJ



"I have many ideas about my business and First Financial knows how to help."
–Ameerah Jones, Owner of Hairstylist for the Nations in Shrewsbury, NJ

Meet Hairstylist for the Nations in Shrewsbury, NJ - one of our valued business members! Watch to learn why owner Ameerah Jones recommends First Financial to other business owners at [youtube.com/FirstFinancialFCU](https://www.youtube.com/FirstFinancialFCU).

If you're looking to book your next hair appointment, check out Hairstylist for the Nations located at 1026 Broad Street, Suite 6 in Shrewsbury. You can also call 732.242.7733.



Spreading Holiday Cheer

We wrapped up 2023 by participating in seasonal food and gift drives to benefit our Monmouth & Ocean County communities. We were able to donate food, winter coats, family games, and reusable water bottles to local charities this holiday season. A big thank you to all who participated!

Common Retirement Investment Mistakes

Having enough money after you retire is a big concern today for Americans. In fact, roughly one in four Americans feel very confident that they will have enough money to live comfortably when they retire, according to a recent survey.

The concern is certainly justified. After all, Americans are living longer lives than ever before, and the uncertainty of being able to maintain a lifestyle for 20, 30, or 40 years after you retire is understandable. While there's no single action that can increase your confidence if you're nearing retirement age, there are several key investment mistakes that, if you avoid them, can help you maximize your retirement savings and perhaps give you the confidence to help you retire with less financial stress. These are the things you'll want to avoid.

Mistake number one: Failing to maximize your contribution. If you can afford to do so, contributing the maximum amount to your employer-sponsored retirement plan will increase the chance that you'll reach your investment goal. The earlier you start, the better. It will allow your investments the opportunity, along with any potential earnings to grow on a tax-deferred basis.

Mistake number two: Failing to develop a plan. Without a plan, it's difficult to understand whether your savings will help support your living standard. As such, establish a plan early, laying out clear goals that incorporate the number of years until your planned retirement. This will help you create a practical investment plan for your goals. Without such a plan, it will be difficult to understand whether your savings will provide you with the living standard to which you've grown accustomed and for each year of your retirement.

Mistake number three: Adopting a short-term investment mindset. The stock market fluctuates a lot and in the short term, there's a decent chance of price volatility. Therefore, selling off your holdings whenever the market drops is a sure way to incur losses that impact your long-term goals.

Mistake number four: Trying to be perfect. Trying to time your investment decisions on when the market will be at its lowest or highest is risky business, and it can lead to missed opportunities. Invest your money with an eye toward the long term.

Mistake number five: Putting all of your financial eggs in one basket. Some investors make the mistake of investing in just one fund or asset type. This is risky business if the market swings and impacts that one holding. On the other hand, if you diversify your risk over a mix of assets, this can help control any potential losses during sharp market swings.

By avoiding these common mistakes, you increase the potential for investment success and reaching your retirement savings goal.

Questions? Contact First Financial's Investment & Retirement Center by calling (732) 312-1534.

You can also email Mary.LaFerriere@lpl.com or Maureen.McGreevy@lpl.com



Securities and advisory services are offered through LPL Financial (LPL), a registered investment advisor and broker/dealer (member FINRA/SIPC). Insurance products are offered through LPL or its licensed affiliates. First Financial Federal Credit Union (FFFCU) and First Financial Investment & Retirement Center **are not** registered as a broker/dealer or investment advisor. Registered representatives of LPL offer products and services using First Financial Investment & Retirement Center, and may also be employees of FFFCU. These products and services are being offered through LPL or its affiliates, which are separate entities from and not affiliates of FFFCU or First Financial Investment & Retirement Center.

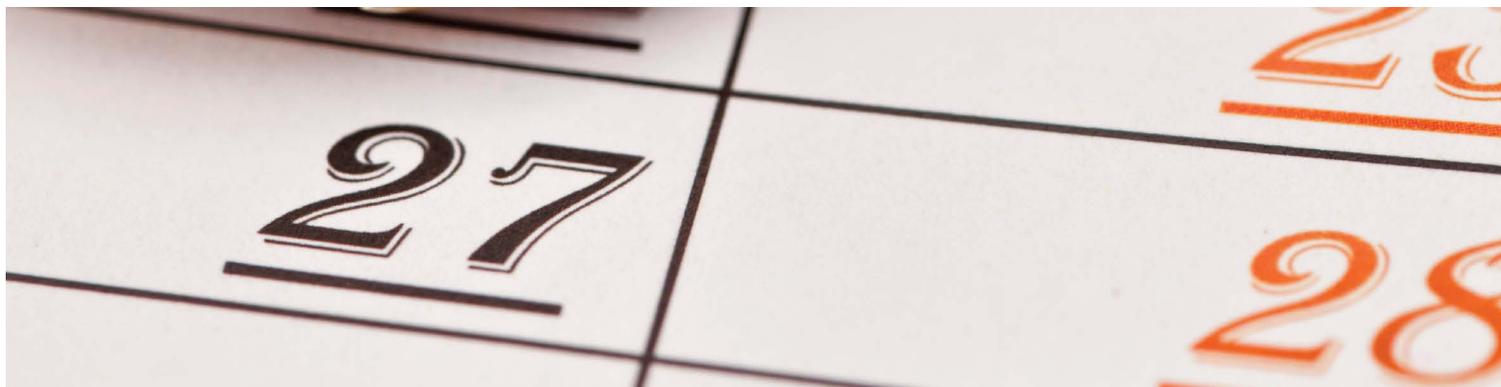
Securities and insurance offered through LPL or its affiliates are:

Not Insured by NCUA or Any Other Government Agency	Not Credit Union Guaranteed	Not Credit Union Deposits or Obligations	May Lose Value
--	-----------------------------	--	----------------

This material is for general information only and is not intended to provide specific advice or recommendations for any individual. There is no assurance that the views or strategies discussed are suitable for all investors or will yield positive outcomes. Investing involves risks including possible loss of principal. There is no guarantee that a diversified portfolio will enhance overall returns or outperform a non-diversified portfolio. Diversification does not protect against market risk. This material was prepared by LPL Financial, LLC. Tracking #1-05363542

Source: 2020 Retirement Confidence Survey Summary Report

Things to Do ASAP in Preparation for Tax Season



April 15th (AKA: Tax Day) will be here before you know it. One of the smartest things you can do is begin to prepare everything you'll need to file sooner rather than later. Here are a few places to start.

Get Your Personal Information Prepared: If the personal information on your tax forms isn't correct, it can be a nightmare. Be sure you know your Social Security Number and that it appears correctly on your forms, and if applicable – your spouse and children's Social Security Numbers as well. It's also a good idea to keep last year's return nearby in case you need it for reference and to ensure everything matches up.

Organize All Your Documents in One Place: Be sure you have access to all of this year's income documents that you will need to file your return and keep them in one spot (a file folder labeled for this tax season or a digital folder on your computer where all the documents are scanned in together). Documents you'll need are your W-2, and any other sources of income like rental income, dividends, or unemployment. If you're a homeowner with a mortgage, you'll also want to have your mortgage interest statement available.

Keep Your Receipts: If you're a small business owner or self-employed, you'll need to file a Schedule C with all of your business expenses. Be sure you have kept your business receipts and expenses

from the past year, and that you store them all together in a place where you can easily locate them to file this year.

Decide How You'll File: Now is the time to choose between doing your taxes on your own or if you'd rather pay a professional. Decide now, because as it gets closer to April 15th – tax professionals may get backed up and not be available to file your return on time. If your taxes aren't overly complicated and you decide to file on your own through TurboTax or H&R Block, First Financial members can save money as well as enter this year's grand prize sweepstakes once you file! Get full details and file online at firstffcu.com.

Need More Time? File an extension. If you don't think you'll have everything ready by April 15th, you can file for an extension with the IRS for October 15th. However, if you owe – you most likely will still need to pay what you owe by the April 15th deadline. Learn more at irs.gov.

Getting ready for tax season early will simplify the process as it draws closer to Tax Day. For more financial tips and resources, subscribe to our blog at blog.firstffcu.com or our monthly member e-newsletters.

Loan Connection (732) 312-1500, Option 4

To Fax Loan Applications
(732) 312-1530 (24-hour)

Contact Us
Local Callers (732) 312-1500
Out of Area (866) 750-0100

info@firstffcu.com
firstffcu.com

Neptune Branch 783 Wayside Road

Toms River Branch
1360 Route 9 South
Corner of Routes 9 & 571

**Freehold/Howell
Service Center**
389 Route 9 North
Next to Howell Park & Ride

Contact Business Development

Chantel Baptiste
Business Development Officer
CBaptiste@firstffcu.com
732-312-1541



First Financial's Supervisory Committee has the responsibility to investigate member complaints that cannot be resolved through normal channels. If you have a complaint or suggestion to improve our service to you or if you have an unresolved problem, please write to:

Supervisory Committee
P.O. Box 751
Neptune, NJ 07754



Information contained in the "Ambassador Courier" is intended to summarize products and services. It is not a complete disclosure of all terms and conditions. All rates and terms are subject to change without notice. For full details, please contact First Financial Federal Credit Union directly at 732.312.1500, email info@firstffcu.com, or visit firstffcu.com. Insured by NCUA

