

Protect Yourself from Mail Theft This Holiday Season

Mail theft tends to increase over the holidays when thieves are hoping to get their hands on checks, gift cards, and packages. To reduce the chance of having your mail stolen, follow these tips:

- Send outgoing mail from inside the post office. Don't leave mail in freestanding mailboxes outside.
- Pick up your mail as soon as possible after delivery. Avoid leaving mail in your mailbox overnight.
- If you are traveling, have the post office place a hold on your mail until you return.
- If you're expecting packages, ask a trusted neighbor to watch for deliveries and pick up your items. You can also have deliveries shipped to a local retailer or a FedEx or UPS facility for pickup.

Mail theft can lead to fraud.

Stolen mail can provide criminals with the personal information they need to perpetrate identity theft and other types of fraud. Mail can be stolen from your mailbox or redirected to another address without your knowledge.

These tips are a good start to preventing the theft of personal information year-round. In addition, you can register for SLFCU eStatements and eNotices so account information doesn't go to your physical mailbox. To sign up, log in to online banking, click on More, then select eDocuments.

Sandia National Laboratories and SLFCU Celebrate Continued Partnership



Sandia Laboratory Federal Credit Union CEO Robert Chavez, along with Josh Parsons, SNL's Chief Financial Officer and Director of Finance and Accounting, and Baylee Brown, Business Specialist, recently met to sign the Memorandum of Understanding between the two organizations.

"Sandia National Laboratory and Sandia Laboratory Federal Credit Union have partnered together for more than 70 years," commented Chavez. "We have been so proud to be the financial institution dedicated to meeting the needs of every generation of Sandians and their families. We look forward to many more years of being an important part of the mission and purpose of this organization." ■



Monitor your accounts closely to detect fraud as soon as possible.

- Contact the Credit Union immediately if you notice unusual account activity or receive a bill you didn't expect.
- Review your credit report regularly to look for accounts you did not open, and dispute any inaccuracies.
- If a merchant declines a payment or if you notice a fraudulent transaction, contact your credit or debit card issuer immediately. Once thieves have your personal information, they can empty your bank accounts and rack up charges on your card quickly.

What to do if you're concerned.

Seeing something questionable can be upsetting. If you think you are a victim of fraud:

- File a police report.
- Contact SLFCU for help with your accounts.
- Report mail theft to the U.S. Postal Service at 877.876.2455.
- Visit the Federal Trade Commission website at ftc.gov for more information. ■

In the Community



Holiday Help for Those in Need

SLFCU is partnering with Roadrunner Food Bank to collect non-perishable food for New Mexico families in need. Visit any New Mexico branch from December 1 - 24 to make a food donation, or make a monetary donation online at rrfb.org.

Home loans.
At the speed of life.

People on the "nice list" prefer
home loans from SLFCU.*

*So do those on the "naughty list."

Apply for pre-approval at
slfcu.org/HomeLoans

End-of-Year Money Moves

Presented by the MEMBERS Financial Services Program* at SLFCU

For potential ways to decrease your tax bill and/or build more wealth, ask yourself these questions before saying goodbye to 2019.

What changed for you in 2019?

Did you start or leave a job, or retire? Did you start a family? If notable changes occurred in your life, you may want to review your finances before 2020 begins.

Do you want to itemize deductions?

The standard deduction for 2019 is now \$12,200 for single filers and up to \$24,400 for joint filers. If it's better for you to itemize, now is a good time to get receipts and paperwork together.

While many deductions have disappeared, key ones still include mortgage interest, charitable contributions, medical or home office expenses, and the state and local tax (SALT) deduction.^{1,2}

Are you withholding the right amount on your W-4?

If you discover that you have withheld too little, you may need to adjust your withholding before the year ends.

Could you ramp up 401(k) or 403(b) contributions?

Doing so may lower your yearly gross income. Lower it enough and you might qualify for tax credits or breaks.

Contributions to Roth 401(k)s and Roth 403(b)s are made with after-tax dollars; they are not deductible and will not lower your taxable income for the year.^{3,4}

Are you retired and older than 70½?

If so, Required Minimum Distributions must be taken from traditional IRAs, 401(k)s, 403(b)s, and profit-sharing plans by December 31 to avoid a penalty.⁵

Can you take advantage of the American Opportunity Tax Credit?

This allows individuals whose modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) is \$80,000 or less (and joint filers with MAGI of \$160,000 or less) to claim a credit of up to \$2,500 for qualified college expenses.⁶

Talk to a financial or tax professional now.

Small year-end moves might improve your financial situation. SLFCU members can take advantage of personal financial management services through our collaboration with MEMBERS Financial Services.* Learn more at slfcu.org/InvestmentServices.

¹nerdwallet.com/blog/taxes/itemize-take-standard-deduction/ [9/6/19]

²nerdwallet.com/blog/taxes/get-charitable-contribution-tax-deduction-3-steps/

³investopedia.com/articles/retirement/06/addroths.asp [7/28/19]

⁴marketwatch.com/story/how-the-new-tax-law-creates-a-perfect-storm-for-roth-ira-conversions-2018-03-26 [2/24/19]

⁵irs.gov/retirement-plans/retirement-plans-faqs-regarding-required-minimum-distributions [10/25/19]

⁶irs.gov/newsroom/american-opportunity-tax-credit-questions-and-answers [6/28/19]

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Thinking About Giving to a Charity This Holiday Season?

If you donate money to a qualified charity or non-profit organization before 2019 ends, your gift may qualify as a tax-deductible charitable contribution (up to 60% of adjusted gross income)¹.

Making a monetary donation to the New Mexico Credit Unions Connected Academy (NMCUCA) helps provide the funding to employ an accredited full-time teacher at UNM Children's Hospital as part of the Mimbres School - a state-accredited, year-round elementary and high school which operates in a hospital setting.



SLFCU has raised \$55,152.13 for the NMCUCA as of November 25, 2019. Donated funds are dedicated to a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization and, if you itemize your tax return, a donation to the NMCUCA could potentially reduce your taxable income.

To help us reach our \$80,000 goal, you can:

- Buy a Hope Heart in New Mexico branches from any SLFCU Teller.
- Purchase a Sandy the Lab stuffed animal in New Mexico branches* for a donation of \$20 or more.
- Donate by calling us at 505.293.0500 or sending a secure message in online or mobile banking.
- Join us at one of our local fundraising events listed at slfcu.org/Calendar. ■

* In California, proceeds from Sandy the Lab stuffed animal sales will benefit UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland.

¹ SLFCU representatives are neither tax advisors nor attorneys. For information regarding your specific tax situation, please consult a tax professional.

College Scholarship Opportunity for New Mexico Students

The New Mexico Credit Union Education Foundation (NMCUEF) is accepting scholarship applications for the 2020-2021 school year. Applicants must be New Mexico residents with a minimum 2.8 cumulative GPA who are enrolled full-time as a college undergraduate at an accredited institution in the state.

The complete scholarship application is available online at cuanm.com/scholarships. Completed applications must be submitted and postmarked to the NMCUEF (**not** to SLFCU) by February 28, 2020. Hand-delivered applications will not be accepted. ■

Ransomware: Don't Become a Victim

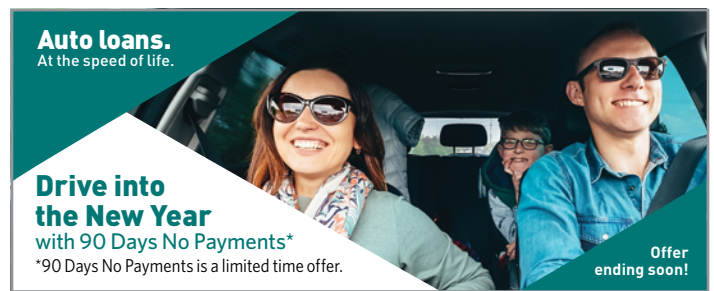
Malicious software called ransomware can deny access to a computer system and its data until a ransom is paid. Ransomware usually spreads when a user clicks a link in a scam (phishing) email or unknowingly visits an infected website, causing the installation of encryption software or a virus on their mobile or desktop device. "This fraud technique has been very profitable for criminals in 2019," says SLFCU Card Fraud Prevention Specialist Eric Mitchell.

Eric says it's essential to understand what ransomware is, as anyone can be targeted. Though it's not all-inclusive, he offers the following overview of common types of ransomware:

- **Screen-locking ransomware** (most prevalent) is where you see a lock (or a similar image) on your screen. Alternatively, it could show a message saying that the FBI or IRS has locked your computer. If you experience this, close your browser immediately, uninstall and reinstall the browser software, then restart your computer.
- **Encryption ransomware** (second most common) allows you to browse your files, but you cannot access them because they're encrypted. If you experience this type of ransomware, take your device to a computer repair specialist for possible decryption.
- **Fake ransomware** (most common on phones) is designed to scare you into paying a ransom. Your files are not affected.

So, what can you do to avoid being a ransomware victim? Though not all inclusive, Eric suggests the following tips. "If possible, install firewall protection and antivirus software on your devices. Keep your operating system and antivirus software up to date, and always keep secure data backups. Download files only from trusted websites. If you think your computer has a virus, take it to a computer repair specialist for help."

"When browsing your emails, look for misspellings or inconsistencies within the message - if it doesn't make sense or seems suspicious, don't click any links within it and delete it. Also, take extreme care when opening email attachments. Remember: a virus activates as the attachment opens. If an attachment seems important, but looks odd, without opening the attachment save it to a specified folder and have your antivirus software scan the file. Lastly, when in doubt, delete suspicious emails." Eric emphasized. ■



Teen Article: A Lesson in Fundraising



SLFCU Teen Member Simran Bhardwaj and her HOSA Bowl team members, Hannah Smith, and Leo Wang

I have always had a passion for studying medicine and am exploring healthcare career fields. Because of this, I was thrilled to find out that my high school had started a Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA) National Medical Club. This organization strives to teach students about healthcare through competitive events. HOSA hosts several medical-related activities and testing events. Students compete in state competitions to qualify for the HOSA National Leadership Conference.

In early 2019, I competed with three other students in a team competition called the HOSA Bowl, where we race to answer medical questions. To our surprise, our team placed and qualified to compete in nationals!

We were thrilled, but our success raised concerns, as traveling to the competition in Florida would be very expensive.

Six students from our school had qualified, and with the added cost of a sponsoring teacher, we estimated the trip would cost about \$12,000.

We immediately began researching the best ways to raise funds, and came up with several ideas. Through my business, Simi's Cupcakes, I started selling treats to school friends for \$2 each, and donated the proceeds to our fundraiser. Our team also contacted restaurants to request fundraising nights. We also attempted to gain sponsors by bringing donation request letters to many businesses.

Despite those efforts, we weren't raising enough money for our cause. So, we decided to do something big: apply for grants. We quickly figured out that writing applications is a long, complicated, and involved process. The same submission can rarely be used more than once, as each application requires different information. We created a cover letter to explain our goal and outlined how much money we needed. We applied through the Albuquerque Public Schools' (APS) Education Foundation, which offers multiple grants and award amounts between \$250 and \$10,000.

Sadly, my team did not receive any grants as the APS Education Foundation had already distributed all of their funds for 2019. We learned some valuable lessons from this experience, however. First, it's better to start fundraising at the beginning of the school year to kick-start our program. Second, grant applications need to be submitted early.

On the bright side, we raised \$300, which was used to purchase custom letters for letterman jackets for 27 of our club members. And, the lessons we learned about fundraising will help make our program better next year - and maybe motivate us even more to qualify for nationals! ■



Teens Can Earn \$100

SLFCU members age 13-17 are invited to submit an article on a financial topic to be considered for publication in our Dollars & Sense newsletter and on our website. Teens are awarded \$100 for published articles. Visit slfcu.org/TeenArticles for details, topic suggestions, and to submit an article. SLFCU will review all submissions and respond within 30 days.

2019 IRA Contributions

Make the most of your retirement savings by contributing the maximum yearly limit to your IRAs. For the 2019 tax year, you can contribute a total of \$6,000 to Traditional or Roth IRAs. If you are over age 50, you can contribute an additional \$1,000 "catch-up" contribution.

Please submit your IRA contribution in advance of the tax filing deadline to allow plenty of time to complete the necessary paperwork.

IRA contributions for 2019 can be made until the tax filing deadline in April 2020. Please consult your tax advisor or financial advisor with questions about your individual tax circumstances.

If you don't have an IRA, get started today at slfcu.org/IRAs. SLFCU offers traditional or Roth IRAs, Education Savings Accounts, and IRA Certificates. Open your IRA account with as little as \$5. ■



Home for the Holidays Photo Contest

Enter to win a \$200 Lowe's gift card!

Go to our Facebook page now through December 31, 2019 and share a photo of your festive holiday or winter decorations in the comments of our Home for the Holidays Contest post. Add a note to share what you like best about this time of year and include #SLFCUHoliday. We'll pick a favorite to win a \$200 Lowe's Home Improvement gift card, and two runners-up will each receive a \$50 Target gift card. For complete rules, visit slfcu.org/PhotoContest.



PO Box 23040, Albuquerque, NM 87192

Dollars & Sense

Protect Yourself from Mail Theft This Holiday Season

SNL and SLFCU Celebrate Continued Partnership

End-of-Year Money Moves

PRSR MKTG
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO 417
ALBUQUERQUE, NM

On the Calendar

NMCUCA Fundraisers

December 19 & 21 • California Pizza Kitchen (NM)

Visit slfcu.org/Calendar to learn how 20% of your bill can be donated to NMCUCA.

Christmas Eve

Tuesday, December 24 • NM Branches Close at 1:00 p.m.

Additional Holiday Hours

December 24-27, 30-31 • Kirtland and Livermore East Reduced Hours

Visit slfcu.org/Calendar for details.

Christmas Day

Wednesday, December 25 • All Branches Closed

New Year's Eve

Tuesday, December 31 • NM Branches Close at 3:00 p.m.

New Year's Day

Wednesday, January 1 • All Branches Closed

Brought to you by the MEMBERS Financial Services Program* located at SLFCU. Register at slfcu.org/Calendar or by calling 505.293.0500 or 800.947.5328.

The Return of Conservative Investing

How to Use CDs and Annuities to Get Back on Track.

Tuesday, December 10 • 9:00 - 10:00 a.m. • Edgewood
Noon - 1:00 p.m. • Tech Park
5:30 - 6:30 p.m. • Tech Park

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