



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: July 9, 2004

Contact: Darcie Saleh, Communications Specialist, 704.367.2706

“Buy Floor Models” Among United Family Services’ Back-to-School Savings Tips

CHARLOTTE, NC – The end of June meant wrapping up graduation gift shopping, as much as it meant just one month’s hiatus before back to school shopping in August! With tips from United Family Services, consumers can develop a manageable budget plan to cut costs when preparing for the upcoming school year.

“Today’s students need more sophisticated supplies than their parents’ generation needed. The demands of their academic programs require personal computers, calculators and expensive lab-fees, and without careful planning, financially strapped families are forced to choose between their child’s education and household bills,” Barbara Robinson, Director, Economic Independence. “Back to school sales, thrift stores and recycling last year’s clothing and supplies are all supplements to the most important step a family can pursue: budgeting.”

As an NFCC member agency, United Family Services offers free or low-cost confidential budget counseling including an analysis of the family’s financial situation and a forum for the family to ask questions and resolve debt issues. □ One of our certified credit counselors will discuss income, debt, assets and liabilities with a family and develop an appropriate plan so they can better manage personal finances. □

When developing the back to school portion of a budget consider the following:

- Make a list and take inventory. Begin with a list of all your back-to-school needs and expenses including supplies, equipment, clothing, and fees for things like sports, music and science labs. Now check around your house for what you already own. Last year’s book bag and supplies like paper, writing utensils and rulers may be just what you need to start the new school year. Clothes, shoes and coats are recyclable and can look like new outfits with inexpensive accessories. Gently used musical instruments and sports equipment are considerably less expensive than buying brand new.
- Buy demos, display and scarred products. For higher ticket items like computers and
(more)

calculators, outside-the-box demos and equipment with small cosmetic blemishes offer great consumer savings, and often come with warranties. There's almost \$80 billion in excess or returned inventory each year, and American retailers and manufacturers realize they can recoup some of their costs by selling these products at a discount to consumers. (*Flaherty, New York Times, March 28, 2004*)

- Invest in smart plastics! Instead of paying for cell phone plans, purchase phone cards. Instead of paying high electronic transfer fees to increase funds in accounts, invest in pre-paid credit cards that allow you to increase credit limits as often as needed. Instead of incurring another car note or auto insurance premium, establish a frequent flyer membership for students away on campus; they can earn points for traveling home.
- Eat wisely on campus. Whether in grade school, high school or college, packing a lunch is not only healthier; it's cheaper than school food counters and trips off campus to a fast food restaurant. Deli wraps and homemade chips; cold cuts, cheese and veggie snack trays; and salads with grilled meat are cheap and easy to make and will keep in lockers or cars for a few hours.
- Comparison shop. Sunday circulars and direct mail coupons provide great updates on sales of trusted, name brand items. Pay particular attention to sales expiration dates! And remember, if it's not on your list, don't buy it even if it is a great deal.
- Pay with cash if possible. To maintain your budget, set a spending amount and stick with it! Pay with cash when possible and leave your checkbook and credit cards at home to avoid temptations for unplanned and unnecessary purchases. If you're short on cash, some stores still offer layaway plans if you need time to save up for purchases.
- Use credit wisely. If you have to use credit, limit purchases to items you can pay off in 90 days or less. If you have more than one credit card, use the card with the lowest interest rate to minimize the amount you'll have to pay back. Remember, using a credit card is like taking out a short-term loan. If you're not careful to minimize charges and make monthly on-time payments, this short-term loan could become a long-term financial and credit disaster.
- Prepare for next year. Start budgeting now for next year. Set aside money that's designated for back-to-school shopping. This way, you won't be overwhelmed by unexpected costs that could lead to a financial crisis.

If back-to-school expenses are driving your budget into a deficit call United Family Services at 704.332.9034 or visit our website at www.unitedfamilyservices.org.

United Family Services is a member of the NFCC, which was founded in 1951. NFCC is the nation's largest and longest serving national nonprofit credit counseling organization. NFCC's mission is to set the national standard for quality credit counseling, debt reduction services and education for financial wellness, through its member agencies. With more than 1,000 community-based offices nationwide, NFCC members help over a million households annually.

United Family Services is a nonprofit United Way member that connects individuals, families and the community with resources that promote stability, security and self-sufficiency. Programs offered by United Family Services are Child Abuse Prevention, Consumer Credit Counseling & Housing Services, Counseling & Education, Employee Assistance, Rape Crisis, The Shelter for Battered Women and Victim Assistance. For more information, call 704.332.9034 or check us out on the Internet, www.unitedfamilyservices.org.