

It's Back to School time!

Five years ago I founded Money Wise Women Educational Services to ensure every woman is financially articulate, confident, secure and independent.

During my 26 years working for the Social Security Administration I met thousands of women who experienced financial difficulties resulting from a personal crisis – husband's death, divorce, illness or loss of a job. If you don't want to be one of these women, it's time to go back to school – the school of finances.

We never really leave school because life presents us with one lesson right after the other. Learning about money is a like learning a foreign language – you're not going to be fluent after attending one conference, reading one book or attending one class. Educating yourself on money is a process. You learn a little, put what you learned into practice and then take the next step.

I'm going to share some ideas and resources on how you can begin or continue your financial education.

Attend a conference, seminars and/or workshop in your local community. Check out local community colleges and watch your newspapers for classes and seminars. We're hosting four Money Wi\$e Women Forums this fall – three in the Puget Sound area and one in Sacramento. And, we're busy planning the 2008 forum schedule, which will include a couple of new areas – Bellingham, Spokane and possibly Smithfield, Rhode Island. The all-day conference features three keynote speakers and 12 breakout sessions taught by local female professional experts. If you live in Southern California, check out the Invest in Yourself Financial Strategies Conference for Women on September 8th. They have excellent keynote speakers a wide variety of breakout sessions.

Read a book. There are lots of books on finances, including my own *Becoming a Money Wi\$e Woman: Getting Your Financial House in Order*. Visit the Money Wise Women website for a list of books I recommend and to read a review on each book.

Start a book club. Starting a book club is a great way to learn about money and finances. The Kitsap County Money Wi\$e Women book club meets monthly to discuss our current book, *The Energy of Money* by Maria Nemeth. In the past three years we've had many interesting and educational conversations. Not only are we learning from the book, but we're also learning from each other by sharing our personal experiences.

Start a Money Club. They're a great way for women to get together and support each other while they're learning about money. Money Club members help each other keep on track because the members are accountable to each other, which keeps everyone motivated. The Women's Institute for Financial Education (WIFE) has all the guidelines for starting a money club. For more information, visit www.moneyclubs.com.

Check out online resources. We have recently introduced the Money Wise Women blog to provide you with a place to communicate and with other women about money and further your financial education. It contains education, empowerment, advice and support from other women -- both financial and professional experts and women who are asking questions, sharing their challenges, success, tips and tools. There are lots and lots of financial resources online. The Women's Institute for Financial Education (www.WIFE.org) provides financial education to women in their quest for financial independence. LifeMoxie is another great source – www.lifemoxie.com. Visit our website for a complete list of online resources.

Another excellent online resource is the Wi\$e Up program, which was developed by the Department of Labor, Women's Bureau. I'm a financial expert for the Wi\$e Up program, which connects women with online resources to achieve financial security. The Wi\$e Up website features an interactive curriculum and suggestions from financial experts. Another component of the program is the monthly, toll-free teleconference call. For more information, visit the website at www.wiseupwomen.org .

The American Savings Education Council (ASEC) is an organization dedicated to making savings and retirement planning a priority. Their website (www.choosetosave.org) has a wealth of resources, including the Ballpark Estimate, online calculators, brochures and savings tips. Money Wise Women Educational Services is one of ASEC's Mission Partners.

Sign up for an electronic newsletter. I've been receiving the Motley Fool newsletter for several years. It's filled with excellent information and tips.

The bottom line – it's never too late to Go Back to School! I hope you'll begin or continue your financial education this month.

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