



# THE KEENE SENTINEL

## **Don't be an "April Fool": 6 Essential Tips Financial Awareness & Planning**

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April is the Time to Think About Planning for the Future

It is the beginning of April, and there are two significant observances that I would like to point out – National Financial Literacy Month and National Retirement Planning Week®.

National Financial Literacy Month was created to highlight the importance of financial literacy and to teach Americans how to establish and maintain healthy financial habits. New Hampshire is involved with National Financial Literacy Month through the NH Jump\$tart Coalition, an organization whose mission it is to improve the financial literacy of pre-kindergarten through college-age youth by providing advocacy, research, activities, standards and educational resources. NH Jump\$tart (<http://www.nhjumpstart.org>) strives to prepare youth for life-long successful financial decision-making.

National Retirement Planning Week will occur April 11-15 to help consumers focus specifically on their financial needs in retirement with a motto "Retire On Your Terms." The National Retirement Planning Coalition, a group of prominent education, consumer advocacy and financial services organizations have joined together to promote and increase awareness of the need for comprehensive retirement planning. Last year, New Hampshire's Gov. Maggie Hassan issued a Proclamation for National Retirement Planning Week and urged all to consider the importance of financial planning for their families, communities and state.

So, why am I bringing these up? I am hoping that these two occasions will prompt people to start preparing for their future, and I would like to help get you started.

Here are some fundamental steps to consider:

**Education is the Key.** One of the most important things you can do to make the best decisions for your future is to educate yourself about finances. Take a class or speak with a financial or tax professional to identify which investment strategy makes the most sense for your situation.

**Begin a Budget.** If you have not done so yet, create a budget. Living on a budget is a great habit to get into and should help prepare you for the future. Most people will be on a fixed income when they retire, and that can be a major adjustment. Monitoring your spending closely can also help trim unnecessary expenses to uncover additional dollars to put towards your savings goals.

**Become a Saver.** This is easier said than done, but it is truly important. The more you can save today, the more your money can enjoy the benefits of compound growth over time. This means fewer total dollars from your pocket to reach your retirement savings goals as the investment growth can compound over the span of several decades.

**Look at Fees.** Fees can be a money drain, eating away a significant portion of your portfolio. Be sure to look at an investment's expense ratio and not just performance returns, and know when to ask for professional help.

**Don't Pass Up "Free Money".** If your work provides a 401(k) or similar plan, try to contribute at least the amount that will be matched by your employer. This is "free money" that can help you reach your retirement goals.

**Open an IRA Account.** If you do not have access to a company savings plan, or you have maxed out your employer contributions, you may consider opening a traditional IRA or Roth IRA. You may also still have time to make a contribution for last year, with April 18 being the deadline for 2015 contributions.

These are just a few things that can help you get started. By being determined to increase your financial education and sticking to your savings plan, you will be on your way to reaching National Retirement Planning Week's goal to "retire on your own terms."

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