Maier minutes

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A WORD FROM WAYNE

by Wayne Maier, BFA™
Founder & CEO - Maier & Associates, Financial Advisor - RJFS

Christmas and New Year have to be my most favorite times of the year. I think it's because most everyone is in a great and caring holiday mood. Experiencing Christmas and the New Year always brings the feeling of a new beginning, It's the time when we put all kinds of things behind us and then promise ourselves to accomplish so much more than we did last year.

During this holiday season, one of the things that I try to do is look back on the year and think about all of the things I am grateful for, such as family, friends, my extended family here at the office, you and your families. I also think about the blessings that I have received throughout the year. These blessings truly make me feel humble and I do not take them lightly. I believe that acknowledging the blessings I have received makes me a more grateful and compassionate person. So, I promise myself that every year I am going to take stock of my life and do what I can do to make the lives of the people I come in contact with better. I am not always successful, but I try, and will keep trying. If you have never tried taking stock of your life, give it a shot.... it may really surprise you!

I would be remiss if I did not spend a little time discussing the markets because they certainly have given us lots to discuss, especially over the last few months. I know I do not have to tell you about the volatility that we have experienced, but I thought I might offer a little insight about the volatility within the markets and how you may want to view the volatility in the future (because there will be more).

I want to take you back in time to when the DOW was at 6,000 (yes, I can remember). I remember that on a particular day the DOW dropped 100 points and the reaction that took place, not only by individual and institutional investors, but also by the financial reporters, was dramatic. As you can imagine, the coverage was extensive and intense, and rightly so, because that was a huge drop.

Today when the DOW drops 100 points (or even 200 or 300 points) institutional investors and, hopefully, individual investors won't overreact. But there are financial analysts who are still reporting things like "The DOW is down three days in a row" or "We are at the lowest point in the last week". But the reality

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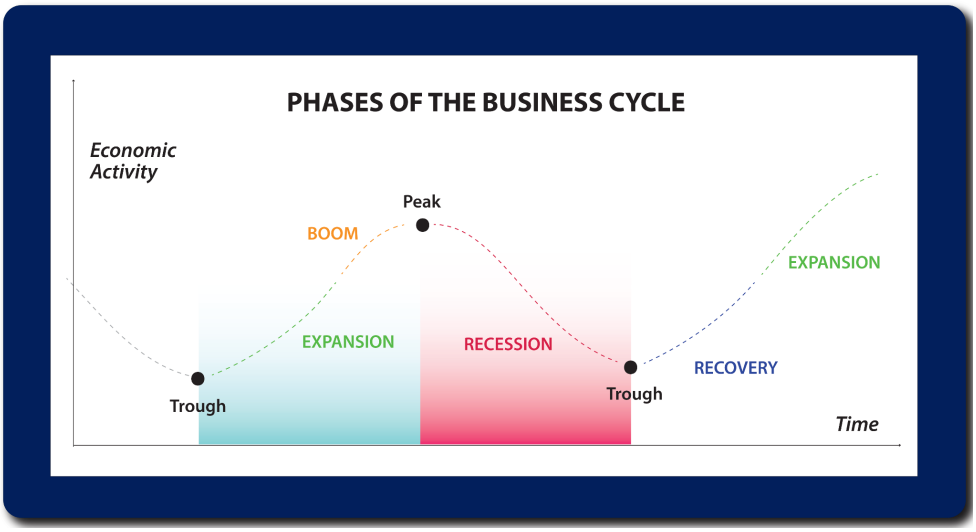
Laura and her family choose their Christmas Tree!

WHAT IS THE BUSINESS CYCLE?

by Logan Maier, RICP®
Finanical Advisor

The Business Cycle is generally defined as the cycle of economic activity or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) produced over time. There are four phases within the cycle. Starting with (1) expansion/growth, the economy generally trends upwards until it reaches a peak, where it begins to (2) decline, until leading into a (3) recession/depression. The low point of the down trend is known as the trough. This is where the economy begins to go into (4) recovery and from here to expansion, and the cycle, historically, repeats.



Although it may seem simple, it is not. There are millions of different inputs that can impact the cycle along the way that do not make it a perfect science - to name a few examples: war, pandemics, and new laws/regulations that are passed. Because of all the different inputs, the business cycle does not go in set time increments. Now that we got through the nitty-gritty details of it, you can think of the economy as a living organism that ebbs and flows in a wavelike fashion throughout the days, months, and years. It is one of the many factors we take into consideration when proposing investments and when looking at economic forecasts for the upcoming years.

A WORD FROM WAYNE

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is that a 100, 200 or 300-point drop from a DOW at 35,000+ does not have the same impact as a 100-point drop from a DOW at 6,000 which, for some of us, causes frustration with the reporting.

I don't want you to think I am knocking financial reporters (even though it may sound that way). They have a job to do and reporting the "good, the bad and the ugly" is part of their job. But we need to remember that not all of us have been investing since the DOW was at 6,000 (or lower). Some of us have started investing when the DOW was at 34,000 (or higher). Therefore, these downturns do have a more significant effect on the minds of fairly new investors. I just suggest that we all should spend more time putting the bad and ugly in perspective.

The one thing that has stayed pretty consistent over the past few years is the recovery of the markets after we have gone through one of these adjustment/corrections. No matter what caused the downturn, the markets seem to shake it off and continue to move forward. There is absolutely no guarantee that this will always be the case, but history certainly reflects these kinds of recoveries. So, my point is that it has always been "time in the market" versus "timing the market" that has been most effective in long term investing. The next time the market decides to shed a few pounds, just sit back, take a deep breath, clear your head, and if you are still feeling uneasy the next day, call me and let's talk.

As you are aware we lost one of our extended family members late last year when Mike's wife Stacey passed away. We all miss her so very much; she was a big part of all of our lives. So, to all of you who lost a loved one in 2021, please know that Rita and I pray that you and your families were able find peace and comfort during your difficult time.

As we move into 2022, I want to take a minute to thank all of you for placing your trust in us. As always, I want to assure you that we will never take you or that trust for granted.

Until next time: Remember the only limitations in life are the ones we place on ourselves…Never limit your dreams!

Eric and Shay pose for a picture on there Jeep adventure out west!

PORTFOLIO PLANS

by Joseph Maier, RICP®, BFA™
Vice President - Maier & Associates, Financial Advisor - RFJS

Last quarter I wrote an article on diversification and, at this point in our market place, I don't think I can stress this enough. Through 2021 we have seen lots of ups and downs in our markets, along with much uncorrelated activity within the equity markets as supply chain constraints have caused lots of chaos. The effects have been pretty different depending on the industry and individual companies.

If we consider our investment strategy based solely on size of a company, generally, there has been a better end result for larger companies based on their ability to obtain supply because of their large orders that cannot be matched by smaller competitors. Additionally, the reduction in employees seems to have a smaller effect on larger companies versus smaller companies as the pool of employees is larger which tends to make it easier to spread extra work load. And generally, smaller companies are not going to "get it done faster" than the large companies, so the end user has to accept the added wait time.

Specific industries have also been impacted tremendously, which can easily have a domino effect onto other companies. Hospitality and food services has suffered for obvious reasons related to COVID and this has trickled into food distributors, airlines and vacation destination areas and their surrounding local economies. Another obvious problem area is the auto manufactures and their inability to obtain computer chips to operate vehicles, which stalls production and stalls ordering of parts from small supply companies. And, again, this snowballs from a problem at the larger level that could lead to layoffs or it could potentially bankrupt a smaller company.

We also have to contend with inflation concerns. Inflation can impact our daily lives and how and where we spend our money. We have to make decisions on how we normally spend our money versus how we will spend it going forward. Inflation can impact specific industries, like technology, with expectations of quick growth. The effect inflation has on bond yields has a negative effect on tech and growth companies. This can be confusing because these companies are still creating new ideas and products but we have to contend with the unique time we are in as it relates to their stock price valuation.

Then the human factor also plays a role when we get concerned or fearful about the future. We all run to buy the necessary day-to-day items that we rely on, such as bottled water and toiletries, and then stores are forced to limit individual purchases.

Where does it begin, where does it stop, when does it stop and who is to blame? These are all great questions that we may never have answers to. So, we have to ask what do we do now?

Our firm is continuing to do what we have always done. We are running our analytical reviews of current investments, and future opportunities. We are staying diversified and continuing to look for opportunities that we feel will benefit our clients and their portfolios. We are keeping risk expectations foremost and trying to avoid that which is unnecessary to accomplish your goals. Most of all, we are here for all clients' questions and concerns.... and the occasional rant!

Amy's granddaughter Brooklyn after her school Christmas program!

SOCIAL SECURITY CHANGES FOR 2022

by Michael Wilcox, ChFC®, RICP®, BFA™

This month I want to outline some important data points regarding Social Security for tax year 2022. First, with inflation increasing dramatically over the last year, the cost of living in the United States has increased. This has an effect on Social Security benefits, whether it be Social Security retirement or disability benefits. Next, it's important to know there have been increases in the amount one can earn while receiving benefits prior to full retirement age. Additionally, there will be changes to the amount of income subject to Social Security tax (this applies to those who are still working).

As mentioned above, Social Security benefits will increase in 2022. According to SSA.gov (2021), recipients of both Social Security retirement and disability benefits will see an increase of 5.9% in January in 2022 in an attempt to keep spending power on par with inflation. Now, I am sure some of you will say this is not "par" (and you may be right), but at least there is an increase. I suspect those of you on Medicare are likely saying, "What I gained in cost of living (COLA), I am giving up in increased Medicare premiums.". As a person who has a keen interest in Social Security COLA increases, this is not surprising nor uncommon. Remember, I don't make the rules, I just try to keep you informed.

For those receiving Social Security retirement benefits, but have not yet reached full retirement age, there are some slight increases in allowable earned income before penalties are assessed. In 2021 one could earn $18,960 per year and avoid any tax penalty. That amount increases to $19,560 per year for 2022. If you exceed the income limits in 2022 you will see your benefit reduced by $1 for every $2 you earned over $19,560. Also, in the year in which the worker reaches full retirement age, the 2022 income limit is $51,960 until the month the worker turns full retirement age. The penalty for exceeding $51,960 is $1 for every $3 you earn over the maximum allowable amount. In both cases I find this explanation from Social Security a little bit sticky. Here is an example of the "stickiness" and hopefully it will make sense. Let's assume a worker begins receiving benefits at age 62 (could be 63, 64, etc. as long as it is not the year that the worker reaches full retirement age). That first year of benefit is considered an interim year and the $19,560 is divided by 12, making the monthly income limit $1,630. In this first year the penalty for exceeding the allowable amount ($1,630) is 100% of the benefit for the month. This means if you exceed that monthly amount by $.01, you forgo all of that month's benefit. I have been told by a Social Security representative they would not assess this penalty, but I have also been told a number of things that in the end were not correct. My guess is the rule is the rule and it would be imposed. Next year this same worker could earn $19,560 all in January and not have an issue because it is not the "interim" year. Fast forward to the year the worker reaches full retirement age. This is another interim year and the $51,960 is divided by 12, and the monthly income limit is $4.330. If the worker exceeds the allowable amount by $.01, you guessed it, the monthly benefit is forfeited. Once the worker reaches the month in which they are at full retirement age, all income limits are waived.

Lastly, there will be an increase in the maximum amount of earnings that is subject to Social Security tax. The maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security tax will increase to $147,000 in 2022 (up from $142,800 in 2021). This means if a worker earns $200,000 in employment income in 2022, they will pay Social Security tax on the first $147,000 only; the remaining $53,000 is exempt from Social Security tax. Keep in mind, though, that Medicare tax does not have an income cap.

I hope this helps you understand the changes to Social Security in 2022 and, as always, please feel free to call if you have any questions.

2022 Retirement Contribution Limits

401(k), 403(b), 457 & TSP Catch up Contributions	$20,500 $6,500
Traditional IRA Catch up Contributions	$6,000 $1,000
Roth IRA Catch up Contributions	$6,000 $1,000
Health Savings Accounts Catch up Contributions:	$3,650 Individual, $7,300 Family $1,000
SEP IRA	$61,000
SIMPLE IRA Catch up Contribution	$14,000 $3,000

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR FIXED RATES OF RETURNS DURING A LOW INTEREST RATE ENVIRONMENT

by Greg Dahlberg, CFP®, RICP®, BFA™

Have you looked at your accounts recently to see how much interest you are being paid (or not) by your local bank or credit union, or have you recently shopped bank CD rates? If so, you were likely surprised to see just how low rates have dropped. We hear plenty about rising inflation and we are seeing costs for just about everything increase. Many economists believe high inflation may continue for some time or, at a minimum, until our supply chain issues are resolved. Current savings and CD rates are approximately .70% or less nationally. I checked bankrate.com on December 17, 2021, to see what the most competitive CD rates were and Capital One and Synchrony Bank were both offering a rate of 1% for a 5-year term. CF Bank was the most competitive for a 1-year CD at .70%. At these rates, our "less volatile money" doesn't stand a chance at keeping pace with inflation. So, what options are available for our conservative dollars that we don't want exposed to the stock and bond markets? Here are a few options to consider that may not keep pace with inflation, however, may provide a little boost to your savings lower risk returns and alternatives to traditional CDs, checking and savings accounts.

Fixed Annuities

Fixed annuities are sold by insurance companies which means they are not FDIC insured and, in most cases, they are not liquid. Fixed annuities are similar to a bank CD in that you earn a guaranteed fixed rate of return for a specified period of time. If you consider this as a way to boost your conservative returns, it shouldn't be with dollars you need to access prior to the end of the surrender period (beyond the free withdraw amount which will vary from one product to the next). Some annuities allow for withdrawals of up to 10% annually without any penalty, and others may restrict penalty-free distributions to interest only. Unlike CDs, the interest accrued is not taxed until the money is withdrawn from the annuity, so interest continues to compound. At the end of the annuity's term, you can cash surrender the annuity at which time any interest accrued would be subject to ordinary income tax (provided you are age 59 ½ or older). You may also opt to keep the contract, at which point your fixed rate of return may change. Or you can opt to roll your annuity into another annuity contract which will not create a taxable event. Annuities are typically not suited to anyone under the age of 59 ½ due to potential tax penalties, in addition to ordinary income tax on the gains. As of December 13, 2021, rates offered through various insurance companies range between 1.80% on a 2-year contract, and as high as 3% on a 5-year. Although these rates likely won't keep pace with inflation either, they are significantly higher than current bank savings and CDs. So, if you have surplus savings that you are confident you won't need access to soon, an annuity may be an option worth considering. Due to the complexities of annuities, it's important for you to consult with a qualified advisor to help assess your situation to see if a fixed annuity is a suitable option for you.

Savings Series I Bonds

Another option you may consider for an increase in rate of return is a Savings Series I Bond. Savings bonds were introduced back in 1935 creating the first "Baby Bond". They are backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. Federal Government. A savings bond is a security issued by the U.S. Treasury or an authorized agent showing that money has been loaned to the U.S. Government and is payable to the person to whom it's registered.

How Much Will I Earn If I purchase an I Bond Today?

The interest rate on new Series I savings bonds is 7.12% (November 2021 through April, 2022). An I bond is a savings bond that earns

	EE bonds	I bonds
Purchase price for paper bonds	Paper EE bonds are no longer available	Paper I bonds can be purchased with your IRS tax refund at face value (a $50 bond costs $50)
Purchase price for electronic bonds	Electronic EE and I bonds are sold at face value.	
Denominations available electronically	Any amount of $25 or more to the penny. For example, you could buy an EE or an I bond for $50.23.	
Interest earnings (electronic and paper are the same)	Interest depends on when the EE bond was issued: • EE bonds issued in May 2005 and after earn a fixed rate of return. • EE bonds issued from May 1997 through April 2005 earn variable rates.	I bonds earn a rate derived from: • a fixed rate of return known when you buy the bond, and • an inflation rate that we calculate twice a year
Maximum amount you can buy	In any one calendar year for one Social Security Number: You may buy up to $10,000 in electronic EE bonds, up to $10,000 in electronic I bonds, and, using your tax refund, up to $5,000 in paper I bonds.	
When interest is earned and compounded	Interest is earned monthly and **compounded semiannually** until the bonds reach 30 years or until you cash them, whichever comes first.	
When bonds can be cashed (redeemed)	After 12 months	
Penalty for cashing early	Loss of previous three months of interest if you cash during the first five years. For example, if you cash the bond after 18 months, you get the first 15 months of interest.	
Income Taxes	Income tax applies at the federal level, but not the state and local levels. Report interest on your federal return either every year or for the year when the first of these things happens: the bond matures, you cash the bond, or you give up ownership of the bond and it is reissued. Tax benefits may be available when you use the money for higher education.	

Information above found on www.treasurydirect.gov.

interest based on combining a fixed rate and an inflation rate. The current fixed rate is 0%, however, the semi-annual inflation rate is 3.56%. When annualized, the rate is a composite rate of 7.12%. In high inflationary periods, I Bonds can aid in keeping pace with inflation. However, in periods of low or no inflation, returns may lag. Based on current inflation rates, you may want to consider I Bonds for a portion of your surplus cash savings. You can purchase up to $15,000 annually per person by purchasing up to $10,000 in electronic I bonds in a Treasury Direct account and by purchasing up to $5,000 in paper I bonds using your federal income tax refund. I Bonds can be purchased for others and are limited to $15,000 per person. An I Bonds bought for another doesn't affect the amount you can purchase for yourself. At the present time, I Bonds are paying a more competitive rate that Series EE Bonds. Below is a summary from www.treasurydirect.gov that highlights the differences between Series EE and I Bonds.

For more information on I Bonds, including how to purchase them, go to *www.treasurydirect.gov*. I Bonds and fixed annuities are just a couple options available to maintain a conservative allocation and boost your returns beyond current savings and CD rates during this high inflation and low fixed interest rate environment. Consult with your advisor to see if these types of products may be suitable for you.



WHAT IS TRADITIONAL MEDICARE?

by Eric Dobrzynski, CFP®, RICP®, BFA™

I want to shed light on the main differences between Medicare parts A and B and how they work together. We get questions about this topic often, especially this time of year due to the amount of mail and phone calls people receive when close to, or older than age 65.

The numbers I will be quoting are for individuals with income less than $91,000 per year, and couples' income under $182,000 per year for 2022. If your income is over these limits, your Part B and D premiums will be different. If you are over the income listed, it is not fun to meet your friend IRMAA (Income Rated Monthly Adjustment Amount). This is an added monthly premium to your part B and D. There is more to understand about IRMAA, but for this article I am only going to explain how this can increase your premiums. If you do receive an IRMAA letter from the Social Security Administration, I encourage you to discuss this with your advisor. Based on your situation, you can file for an appeal.

Traditional Medicare has both Part A and Part B. You do not have to have anything other than Traditional Medicare if you are over 65. But as you will find in this article, you may be on the hook for out-of-pocket costs unless you add a Supplemental or Advantage policy. There are some rules with Traditional Medicare if you are still working full time and covered under your employer's health plan at or after age 65. I will not discuss these details here as they can be different for each specific employer health plan rules and requirements.

Part A is known as Hospitalization only. This is coverage you have paid for throughout your career. There was/is a withholding from your paycheck for Part A. If you did not work enough quarters to qualify for Medicare Part A, you may still qualify under a spouse's benefit. There is a misconception that Medicare Part A is "free", but if you do not have enough quarters paid into Social Security, then there is either a $274 per month or $499 per month cost, depending on income. Part A coverage starts when you are admitted to the hospital. There is an upfront $1,556 (2022) deductible for Medicare Part A. And there is a co-insurance amount of $389/day while in the hospital for days 61 through 90. You have to be careful because you could pay this deductible up to 5 TIMES per year. Yes, you read that right!!! If you are hospitalized, released, and re-admitted after 61 days, even for the same health related reasons, the deductible (co-insurance as well if held for the time period) resets and must be paid again.

Part B is for everything else medically related, except for prescription coverage. Part B has a monthly premium of $170.10 (2022). The premiums generally will come out of your Social Security benefit if you are currently on benefit. If you are not on benefit, your Part B premiums are billed on a quarterly basis. Again, as mentioned above, there can be an IRMAA on top of your monthly premiums based on your income. Also, for Part B, there is an annual deductible of $233 (2022, per year). Check with your doctor's office on covered services not subject to the annual deductible.

Traditional Medicare generally does not include Dental and Vision coverage. There can be coverage for Dental and Vision under Medicare Part B if you have a medical condition which falls under the listed coverages. You will have to check with your doctor/hospital to know if this coverage is included.

Traditional Medicare does not include prescription drug coverage, therefore, if you want prescription drug coverage you will need to purchase a Part D plan. These plans can be purchased through an insurance agent or directly at Medicare.gov. With a Part D plan, you can have the premiums paid monthly from a personal account or you can request that the premiums be withdrawn for your Social Security benefit. Depending on the Part D plan you choose, there generally is an annual deductible of $488 (2022).

An important topic with Part D prescription coverage that we are not a fan of, is the "Donut Hole" or "Coverage Gap". Even if you are told the Donut Hole has officially closed, there still can be a coverage gap. When you and your plan have paid out $4,130 (2022), you will have to pay 25% of the prescription costs. The manufacturer will pick up 70% of the cost and then the government picks up 5%. you will be responsible for the 25% difference. Once you have spent a total of $7,050(2022) for all of your prescriptions, you will fall into the "Catastrophic Coverage Phase". This is when you only pay a small co-insurance of 5% of the drug cost for the remainder of the year. This can have a big financial impact as we have seen clients go into and through the "Donut Hole" onto catastrophic coverage within the first couple of months of the year when taking an expensive name brand drug.

I wanted to provide a brief crash course on how Traditional Medicare works. There are more intricacies in which information I covered can differ for your specific situation. This is where we come into play and plan ahead with you as you approach Medicare and/or are on Medicare.

I will get into the differences between Traditional Medicare and picking up a Medicare Advantage or Medicare Supplement policy in the next article, so stay tuned!

INCOME TAX CHECKLIST

This form is to assist you in gathering your income tax information. It is not all encompassing – if you're not sure about an item, it is better to include it or jot down questions about it than to lose a possible deduction. **Please be sure to include all income documents (W2/W2G forms, all 1099 and 1099R forms, etc.) with your paperwork to your tax advisor.**

General Information:

- ☐ First, middle initial, and last names of taxpayers and dependents as written on the Social Security cards, and dates of birth for taxpayers and all dependents, especially new dependents.
- ☐ Address (city, state, zip), contact number, e-mail address
  - * Are you active duty military? Yes ___ No ___
- ☐ Marital Status: Single ___ Married ___ Head of Household ___ Separated ___
- ☐ Number of dependents ____
  - * Did any dependents have income? Yes ___ No ___
- ☐ Do all dependents live with you? Yes ___ No ___

Types of Income & Reporting Forms:

- ☐ Wages: All W-2's
- ☐ Pension/Retirement Income: 1099-R
- ☐ Social Security: SSA-1099
- ☐ Bank Interest: 1099-INT
- ☐ Dividends: 1099-DIV
- ☐ Commissions: 1099-MISC
- ☐ Tips and Gratuities Received
- ☐ Sales of Stock, Mutual Funds: 1099-B
- ☐ Income from Rentals: All 1099-MISC
- ☐ Business Income: All 1099-MISC & 1099-K
- ☐ Farm Income
- ☐ Alimony Paid or Received
- ☐ Unemployment: 1099-G
- ☐ Crypto Currency Transactions
- ☐ Supplemental Income: Schedule K-1
- ☐ Miscellaneous: Jury Duty, Gambling, Other

Business Income & Expense Items:

Total gross income	Advertising	Auto: Parking & Tolls	Business phone
Cell phone expense	Subcontractors	Commissions	Insurance
Interest paid	Office Expense	Rent/lease fees	Repairs
Legal & professional fees	Supplies	Cleaning & maintenance	Dues & publications
Small tools	License fees	Taxes	Employee benefits
Education/Training expenses	Association dues	Bank/credit card fees	Postage
Meals & entertainment	Hotel & travel	Asset purchases	Business mileage

Additional Items for Rental Properties:

Keys	Condo/PUD fees	Management fees	Mortgage statements
Lawn care/Snow removal	Pest control	Trash removal	Other

Deductions & Credits:

Student loan interest	IRAs /Keogh/SEPs	HSA acct. information	Self-employed health insurance
Teacher expenses	Adoption expenses	Early withdrawal of savings penalty	

College education expenses (1098-T from college is now required for education credits):

Tuition Fees Book Expenses

Alimony paid or received :

Name and Social Security number of recipient Date of divorce or legal separation

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Child & dependent care:

- ☐ Provider name
- ☐ Provider address
- ☐ Provider Social Security number or EIN
- ☐ Amount paid per child or adult dependent

RMD distributed as a Qualified Charitable Donation (QCD):

- ☐ RMD source name
- ☐ Amount distributed
- ☐ Name of charity

Itemized Deductions

Medical/Dental:

Medical & dental bills
Out-of-pocket expenses
Medical & dental insurance
Prescriptions
Lab fees
Long term care insurance
Glasses/contact lenses & supplies
Medical miles
Hearing aids

Taxes:

Prior year state tax paid
Personal property tax (license plates)
City/local tax
Sales tax
Other
Real estate tax

Charitable Contributions:

Church
March of Dimes
Red Cross
Salvation Army
Out-of-pocket volunteer expenses
Boy/Girl Scouts
American Heart
MDA/MS
Food bank
Charitable miles
United Way/CFC
Easter Seals
YWCA/YMCA
Payroll deductions
Other

Non-Cash Donations :

Date of donation
Item descriptions
Fair market value for each donation of household goods and clothing items donated to qualified charitable organizations.

Miscellaneous:

Investment expenses
Gambling losses

Estimated Tax Payments:

Dates of payment and amounts paid for each federal, state and local quarterly tax payment

Questions for your preparer:

Frosted Gingerbread Cookies

For the Gingerbread Cookies:

2 and 3/4 cups all purpose flour

2 and 1/2 tsp ground ginger

1 tsp ground cinnamon

1/4 tsp ground cloves

1 tsp baking soda

1/2 tsp salt

1 1/2 sticks unsalted butter, at room temperature

3/4 cup granulated sugar

3/4 cup light brown sugar, packed

2 tsp pure vanilla extract

2 large eggs, at room temperature

1/4 cup molasses (mild, not blackstrap)

For the Cream Cheese Frosting:

(1) 8 ounce block cream cheese, VERY soft

1/4 cup unsalted butter, VERY soft

1 tbsp vanilla pure extract

2 cups confectioners' sugar, sifted

2 tsp fresh squeezed lemon juice

1 tsp lemon zest

For the Gingerbread Cookies:
In a large bowl whisk together the flour, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, baking soda, and salt; set aside.

Add butter, both sugars, and vanilla to the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment; beat on medium-speed until light and fluffy; scraping down the sides of the bowl as needed, about 2 minutes. Add in the eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition, continuing to scrape the sides as needed. Add the molasses and beat until combined. Reduce the mixer speed to low and slowly add dry ingredients, beating just until combined. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and transfer to the refrigerator to chill for at least two hours (or up to one day).

When ready to bake:
Preheat oven to 350 degrees (F). Line two large baking sheets with parchment paper; set aside.

Roll the dough into 2" balls and arrange on prepared sheets, spacing them about 2 inches apart. Lightly press down on the center of each cookie. Bake, one sheet at a time, for 9-10 minutes, or until puffed and lightly golden.

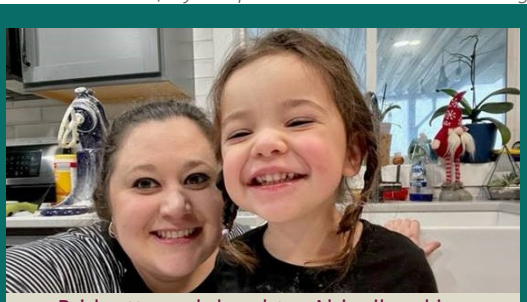
Remove pan from oven and allow cookies to cool on the baking sheet for 5 minutes before transferring them to a wire rack to cool completely. Repeat with all cookie dough. Once cool, frost with cream cheese frosting, top with sprinkles (if using), and serve.

For the Cream Cheese Frosting:
In the bowl of a stand-mixer fitted with the paddle attachment beat the cream cheese, butter, and vanilla on medium-high speed until completely smooth; about 2 minutes. Reduce the speed to low and gradually add the sifted confectioners' sugar. Once all of the sugar has been added, increase speed to medium-high and beat for 1-2 minutes. Add in lemon juice and lemon zest and beat for an additional minute. Once the cookies have completely cooled, spread the frosting over the top of each cookie and decorate with sprinkles, if desired.

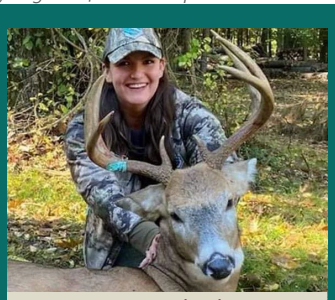
5	3			7				
6			1	9	5			
	9	8					6	
8				6				3
4			8		3			1
7				2				6
	6					2	8	
			4	1	9			5
				8			7	9

Greg has dinner in Texas with his parents, Harold & Sandra and sister, Tammy!

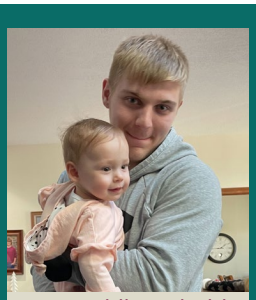
Maier & Associates Family Spotlight



Bridgette and daughter Abigail making Christmas cookies!



Vanessa had a successful fall!



Nate Dahlberg holds his niece Nora!

Greg & his granddaughter, Nora!

Nate Dalhberg totes the annual Christmas tree!

Maressa and family bundle up and enjoy northern Michigan!

Michele's daughter, Emily & family!

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