

# Consumer Corner

## Balancing Budgets Better

(NAPSA)—It can pay to avoid charging blindly into your household shopping. That's the advice from financial experts who report many shoppers have an "urge-to-splurge."

The advice seems particularly relevant considering the average American has a household debt of \$14,900—in addition to a mortgage and car payments.

"The best thing you can do for your family's fiscal health is make a spending plan and stick to it," says Mike Croxson, president of Amerix Corp.—the nation's largest technology and service provider to the non-profit credit counseling industry. The company offers these tips:

### Shopping

- Make a list of what you want to buy and set a price limit for each item.
- Pay with cash, check or debit card.
- If you must use a credit card, use only one, and make sure it has the lowest interest rate of all your cards. Try to pay the bill in full.

### Plan Ahead

• Devise a plan to pay off your credit card debt. Pay off cards with the highest interest rates and annual fees first. Be sure to read the credit card's fine print. Understand how long particular "low rates" last and whether the rates are valid for any balances you transfer. Check on the price of cash advances as well.

• Think about your mortgage. Interest rates are at historic lows, so it could pay to refinance. Con-



**Buy Smart—Experts suggest making a strict budget and sticking to it.**

ventional wisdom says to refinance when you are planning to stay in a house for two to three more years and the rate offered is around two percentage points better than the one you have. Many people are jumping from 30 to 15 year mortgages. That can save you money in the long run, but remember that it means writing a bigger check each month. Keep in mind fees for originations, appraisals and services. Also, don't forget to put aside "rainy day" savings to cover you for three to six months.

For more information or to contact a nonprofit credit counseling agency, visit [www.amerix.com](http://www.amerix.com) or call 1-800-348-6935.