

Saving may be an obsession elsewhere, but it isn't part of the American psyche.

That \$20 bill you expected to last a week, or that was earmarked for a savings plan, quickly dribbles down to a quarter or a dime. And that is that.

One way to get with both a budget program for the year as well as a long-term savings plan is to find a money

By Craig Reem

management tool that gives you slots in which to fill in figures.

Most budget books give you pages by month, a quarterly wrapup and an annual wrapup.

"The Budget Kit" goes a step or three beyond that with lists atop lists.

If you follow the road map, you'll be on your way to budgeting your money and knowing which black hole it's going down. As author Judy Lawrence told OC Metro: "Once people start keeping track of their spending, they spend less money and save more money."

One word of caution: Pick out only those sections that apply to you. Readers often buy books and attempt to utilize each section. That's not necessary here. If you try everything, you might be so overwhelmed you'll go blow \$5,000 on a trip on the QEII. Or spend that \$20 on cappuccino for four.

"What I really try to do is provide a variety of guidelines for individual situations," Lawrence says. "For some people, keeping track every day is the most critical thing. For others, having an outline ahead of their month is the best."

But whatever you do, the key is discipline. It becomes a matter of sitting down and tracking the money trail. Where does it lead? Where should it lead?

Perhaps the most important chapter is the first one: "Setting Financial Goals." Here you write what your goals are and how you expect to meet them. It is difficult to cheat because the sav-

ings record requires details. Lawrence, a personal budget counselor based in Albuquerque, got the original concept for the book while working with divorced and widowed women at a local college. Many of them did not know how to manage money. Since then, the idea has grown to include anyone who spends money, which is all of us.

"It is for the conscientious consumer who is really wanting to start managing their money more effectively," she says. "It's a resource tool to help them get organized and to become more aware of their finances."

Among the chapters is "Monthly Budget Worksheet," a guideline for paying your bills each month as well as planning for and organizing household and personal expenses. There are

fixed amounts, such as a mortgage payment, that do not change; and there are fixed variable costs, such as electricity, that will go up and down but won't go away. There is a category for occasional expenses, such as photo development and prescriptions, and installment plans for that Visa card you need to pay down.

About a third of the way in comes a comforting chapter for those items you wish you could buy when you have some extra dough. It is a "Needs/Wants List" for adults and children. Hopefully, this section doesn't remain bare for the year.

The "Yearly Budget Worksheet" organizes your spending plans for a year.

The other chapters include a worksheet for gifts; for subscriptions; for debt payments; for mail-order purchases; medical expense record; child-support payments; and miscellaneous.

"Once they have a sense and a clarity about where their money is going, they can have choices," Lawrence says. "One woman said that she hadn't realized she was spending \$60 a month at the vending machine. So you start redirecting those 20- and 50-dollar bills where they are more meaningful and satisfying."

Budgeting Your Life

Discovering how the money goes down a black hole helps you decide the best route to save some of it.

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"The Budget Kit: The Common Cents Money Management Workbook"

By Judy Lawrence

97 pages; \$15.95

(Dearborn Financial Publishing Inc., Chicago)

Try local bookstores or call

1-800-283-4380

(\$4 handling fee)

