



December 2016

Quick Blips

TRTA's Informative & Protective Services

Shopping by Mobile Phone

Mobile shopping by phones accounted for \$4.61 billion in sales from Thanksgiving through cyber Monday. Smart-phone shopping is changing the way people shop in four major ways: (1) Impulse buying: The phones entice people to shop right when they're thinking about it. Retailers are adjusting by making it easier to find items so that shoppers don't move on quickly. (2) Phone shoppers are fixated on deals, so retailers are shifting to a stream of discounts and alerts. They are using "flash sales" and pages like "Steals and Deals." (3) Phone shoppers want speedier service. Some stores are using Facebook Messenger to interact with shoppers. (4) Phone shoppers use stores differently. They may shop online for bargains, comparing prices, and then head to the stores. [AP: New York. 12.2.16]



Working in Retirement: Costly?

Make sure you pay attention to your income during retirement. The extra income may have serious tax and benefit implications. Those below full-retirement age may have to pay some of their income back if they make more than \$15,720 annually. The amount goes up each year. In 2017, the amount will be \$16,920.

If you work during retirement, you will probably be pushed up into the next tax bracket. That is especially true if you begin distributions from your 401K or IRA or from a pension. And if you take Social Security on top, that could be taxed as well.

In 2016 joint filers can make up to \$75,300 in taxable income and still be in the 15% tax bracket. The next bracket is 25%, so anything you make after that you would

pay an extra 10 cents on each additional dollar in federal taxes. You may want to time your distributions so you're not pushed into the next bracket or to use taxable income such as savings or brokerage accounts, which are taxed on capital gains, not as income.

Pensions are usually unaffected by part-time work, but they do count as income when it comes to tax brackets and qualifying for health subsidies. [Michael Molinski: *US TODAY*. 11.27.16]



Alzheimer News Bursts

Good news projected a slight decrease in the incidents of Alzheimer's disease based on the number of senior adults keeping their minds active and arriving at retirement as educated with multiple higher degrees. The following day, the Alzheimer's Association announced that Alzheimer's is the only cause of death among the top 10 in the U.S. that cannot be prevented, cured, or slowed. Today, more than 5.4 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's. Texas families number 350,000 who have loved ones living with Alzheimer's. Early treatment helps along with physical activity. [Ty Fleeman, Alzheimer's Assn. *Amarillo Globe-News*, Nov. 2016]

Eli Lilly's experimental treatment for Alzheimer's failed a widely anticipated study. The drug did not work better than a placebo treatment in a study of more than 2,100 people with mild Alzheimer's. The drug binds to a protein called amyloid that builds up in the brains of Alzheimer's patients. The drug clears the protein from the brain before it can clump together to form a sticky plaque between nerve cells. Researchers still have hope to find a cure. Eighteen other drugs are in late-stage testing. [AP: Indianapolis. *Amarillo Globe-News*, 11.25.16]



Heloise's Quick Scam Education

In your Internet's search box, type "common fraud schemes." Click on www.fbi.gov. There, you will have choices of scams on which to peruse and educate yourselves. [Heloise. *Amarillo Globe-News*. 12/2/16].



Fighting Insomnia Because . . .

SHUTi (online) offers a cognitive behavioral therapy course for insomnia. The six-week course is referenced by Harvard Health as one of the best-studied programs. The course costs \$135. One student says she kept an online sleep diary. She says, "Never take a book or phone to bed. Never stay in bed without sleeping. Allow yourself 15 minutes to go to sleep. It's all in the training." NBC News stated that even an hour or two of lost sleep dramatically increases your risk of having a wreck while driving. Risks exponentially increase with each additional hour of lost sleep. Driving sleepy is as bad as driving drunk. Twenty percent of all auto accidents relate to driving sleepy. [NBC *Nightly News*. 12.6.16]



Thieves Infiltrating App Store

Watch for the App trap, fake apps created by thieves hoping to steal personal information, credit card numbers. These apps look legitimate. Recognize fake apps when they have no reviews, bad English, and links to other apps. Look for multiple customer reviews. Stay away from new ones. [NBC *Nightly News*. 11.10.16].



A Series of Quick News Alerts from November 3 Nightly News

An Important Conversation with Your Grandchildren

A new "Truth or Dare" game is going around Facebook. Young folks are being dared to do inappropriate things that can turn illegal. It's an app that dares someone to take off their shirt and send a photo to a stranger or break something belonging to someone else.

A new **IRS Scam** threatens lawsuits for unpaid taxes. The calls come from India. These scams have already affected 15,000 people and cost \$300 million dollars.

Good news: Apple has a new feature—the emoji tool bar.

It's a myth. Cranberries and their juice will not help with urinary tract infections.

Virtual kidnapping is costing seniors a fortune. They are snaring people off the street. They get names and information about your family from social media. They call you and introduce a crying granddaughter. Who can tell a teen grandchild's cry from another's? The kidnappers demand that you drive to a certain place, wire the required money into an out-of-the-country account. You must remain on the phone while they track you by using Google maps. They direct you where to go. They are skilled at creating anxiety. Your only hope is that you demand that they ask the teen a question that only your grandchild can answer. [NBC *Nightly News*. 11. 3.16]

Compare Drug Pricing: Because the price of drugs is becoming prohibitive, because some insurances are refusing to pay for some medications, and because employers decide what will be covered, you may want to consider **BlinkHealth.com** or **GoodRX.com** to shop for better prices on some drugs. Ask your doctor about generic drugs. [NBC *Nightly News*. 10.5.16]

Chemicals in antibacterial soaps may negatively affect hormonal levels (testosterone and estrogen).

Explosions: Samsung Galaxy Note 7 smartphones have been exploding because of the Lithium Ionian batteries.

Medicare Fraud: Report fraudulent charges for procedures not performed at <StopMedicareFraud.gov>.

E-Mail attachments: Never open them unless you know what comes with it, even if it comes from a friend.



A Series of Messages from TRTA

TRTA Board of Trustees changed Medicare advantage plans from Aetna to Humana. When you are dis-enrolled from Aetna, you are immediately enrolled in the new Humana Medicare Advantage plan. [Tim Lee's *Inside Line*]

The average medical cost per TRS-Care participants is \$3,248. Non-Medicare participants cost between \$7,531 for TRS-Care1 to \$10,273 for TRS-Care-3.

Pharmacy claims per member continue to rise, at \$3,132 in 2016, up \$130 over 2015, and up over \$500 in 2014.

By 2018, the shortfall is projected to be \$335 million and \$2 billion by the fiscal year 2020.

The Texas Legislative Study Group's report recommends that retirees bear the burden of the growing TRS-Care costs. They want to place the impending \$1.3 to \$1.5 billion budget shortfall on retirees. The effective date will be January 1, 2018. [Before the Bell 11/22/2016].

A PLEA to all Retirees: This recommendation calls for reasoning, calm responses from retirees and active teachers to our legislators. Thank them for the \$768 million to cover last year's shortfall. We are willing to pay our fair share. We want a fair, shared increase in premiums—not just retirees bearing the entire load. Always be courteous. Consult your legislative chair for additional suggestions, but please write, text, or email your legislators prior to their January session. [Judy Hart, chair of I&PS Committee. 12.6, 2016].



Struggling to Make Mortgage Payments

December 30, 2016, is the last day to apply for assistance under the Home Affordable Modification Program (HAMP). The program may help you lower your monthly mortgage payments. Eligibility: You must have received

the mortgage on or prior to Jan. 1, 2009. You owe less than \$729,750 on the primary residence or rental property. You do not need to be in default. Visit www.makinghomeaffordable.gov or call 888-995-HOPE (4673). [Rebecca Unruh, Attorney, Division of Financial Practices, FTC. Dec1, 2016]



Recover from Identity Theft

Thieves may use your personal information to open accounts, file taxes, or make purchases. Visit <IdentityTheft.gov>. Tell the FT Commission what happened. They will help you with a personal recovery plan. They will walk you through each recovery step, update your plan as needed, track your progress, and pre-fill forms and letters for you. Topics include the following: What to do right away. What to do next. Mores steps to do. Steps for certain accounts such as your phone, utilities, government benefits, saving accounts, home rentals, investment accounts, and bankruptcies filed in your name. Special forms of ID theft include tax ID theft, child ID theft, and medical ID theft. [Amy Hebert. Consumer Education Specialist. FTC].



NetSpend Decks Consumers

The FTC says that NetSpend decked consumers with deceptive claims for prepaid debit cards causing severe financial hardships, including evictions, repossessed vehicle, and late fees. When consumers closed their accounts, NetSpend imposed fees that depleted the funds from the cards after consumers were unable to activate them. [Leslie Fair. FTC. 11/10/2016]



House Wraps Are Bogus

The FTC accuses Innovative Designs, Inc. with failure to substantiate claims that the house wraps instead of insulations measures the R-value (resistance to heat flow). [Coleen Tressler. Consumer Ed. Specialist FTC. 11/ 29 /16].