June 2010 *MoneyMinute* – Thrifty (and Better) Fun

By Bob Veres

For many people, one of the biggest take-aways from the recent market meltdown was the rediscovery of many kinds of fun that don't cost money – a lot of the things that people did years ago before the advent of 3D movies, gourmet restaurants, traveling soccer teams and endless consumerism.

In fact, one financial planning firm took a poll of its clients, asking them what kinds of fun things they had rediscovered while they were tightening their belts. What they found was that many people were having MORE fun with less money, simply by being creative.

Other advisors are asking similar questions, and reporting the answers so that everybody can see what their friends and neighbors have discovered/rediscovered. They received answers like: working jigsaw puzzles as a family, or playing board games (like Parcheesi or Scrabble) in the evening, inviting friends over to play cards, taking walks, creating a new flower garden (or, in one case, turning the entire front lawn into a flower garden of spectacular beauty), hiking in the local state park, attending a variety of free seminars, getting more involved in community meetings, having group cookouts where everybody shares the cooking or brings dishes, joining a book club – the original advisory firm now has several hundred suggestions, and counting.

Of course, the lesson is something that we somehow manage to forget from time to time: that the world is full of endless possibilities for fun and pleasure and satisfaction and beauty, and some of the most interesting cost us nothing. In fact, the shared togetherness of many of the "rediscovered" activities makes them superior to how many people were spending their time before the market dropped.

It would be a shame if we learned these important lessons and then let our rediscoveries slip away now that people are feeling a bit wealthier again. They call these the "simple" pleasures, but there's nothing simple about being creative and really looking at the beauty and possibilities of the world around us. It's possible that we can be thriftier AND enjoy life more if we use our minds and hearts and each other to bring pleasure and fun into our lives.

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