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Our Exclusive Newsletter for Individuals

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Rebuilding After A Disaster pg1-3
- Mike's Notes Pg 2
- Building Your Credit Pg 4-5
- ABM rated in Top 50, Best places to work in Houston. Pg 4
- ABM Bad Joke of the month Pg 5
- How to protect yourself and loved ones from Measles Pg 6-7
- Referral program Pg 8



Rebuilding After a Disaster

by: Lior Zitzman

The unfortunate truth is that disasters happen. Even those who prepare for natural disasters, such as hurricanes or wildfires, may still suffer catastrophic losses. When these types of emergencies devastate homes and towns, individuals and families find themselves required to make several big decisions in a short amount of time, including whether they'll stay or leave. Once a hurricane, fire, tornado, flood, or earthquake has passed, there's one main decision many people have to make: After losing everything in a disaster, do you rebuild in the same area or pack up and head somewhere safer? Here are some major factors to consider when trying to answer such a question.

- Can you rebuild to a higher construction standard that would make your new home sturdier and more disaster-resistant than the old one?
 - Will you be able to get (or afford) insurance on a rebuilt structure in a disaster zone?
 - Are neighbors, local businesses and public services likely to return and rebuild?
- Given that you'll need to make this difficult decision sooner than later after a disaster, we've put together a resource guide to help you prepare. With some forethought and precaution, you'll be able to make the most responsible decision for your family.

When you're shopping for a home, it's important to know the risks. Different terrain and geographical features expose homeowners to different dangers, and you need to know

Mikes Notes



ABM Insurance ranked in Top 15 Best Places to work in Houston!

The Houston Business Journal (HBJ) recently awarded ABM Insurance & Benefit Services Inc. as one of "Houston's Best Places to work" for 2019. The Houston Business Journal conducts surveys every year, surveying employees, vendors and clients. Surveys are ranked on a scale of 1 to 100.

We were pleased to award ABM Insurance & Benefit Services, Inc. as one of Houston's top 15 "Best Places to Work" in the Greater Houston area.

"Given Houston's size, this is a tremendous honor. We have an excellent team and we all have the same goal – To serve our clients, making their experience with our products satisfying and assuring. ABM could never satisfy the needs of our clients without an outstanding support team... and that is what we have. We recognize the outstanding service of our team.", says President of ABM, Mike Alexander, Jr.

ABM Insurance & Benefit Services, Inc. has roots dating back to 1989 and has been serving Houston communities for 31 years, protecting Business and Individual property and lifestyles through affordable insurance coverage. They currently have 20 employees and qualified under Houston Business Journal's small business (11-50 employees). The ABM team live by a set a values and philosophies:

Values and philosophy

- Our principal goal is to provide quality insurance protection for our customer's property and lifestyle through affordable insurance solutions.
- Listen to our customers and provide them with real solutions.
- Be creative and innovative by searching for ways to improve the way we conduct business thus improving the customers experience.
- Be flexible with ability to respond to our customers demands without hesitation.
- Be responsive to our customers request.
- Be true and honest in all our dealings.

As a licensed insurance agency, ABM provides all forms of insurance including Home, Auto, Life, Health, Employee Benefits, Bonds, Medicare Plans and Commercial Insurance. Call ABM if you need help with any form of coverage / protection. You will be glad you did. You can reach the ABM team at 281-448-3040 or 800-362-2809. They are also on the web at www.getagreatquote.com



Continued from page 1

what you're signing up for, in terms of weather and environmental risks.

- **Hurricanes.** If you purchase a home in a coastal area that's exposed regularly to tropical weather, you should research the hurricane risk for the area. There are even online records indicating where every hurricane has hit the U.S. since 1985.
- **Fires.** Many areas are at risk for fires, including those with hot, dry weather, and woodlands with fallen timber. Online maps can illustrate areas of high wildfire risk.
- **Earthquakes.** You should also research your home's earthquake hazard risk. FEMA Earthquake Hazard Maps are helpful for showing which areas are most vulnerable.
- **Flooding.** Similarly, if you purchase a home in a flood zone (you can check the FEMA Flood Map Service), you'll need to prepare for the possibility of flooding.
- **Tornadoes.** If you buy a home in a tornado zone, particularly in Tornado Alley, you should know your risks and take precautions. Typically, in communities where the risk is greater, homebuyers should look for homes that are built to withstand the areas' typical natural disasters as best they can.



Natural disasters can cause significant damage to a home, but the amount and type of damage vary greatly. For example, hurricanes can cause damage due to strong winds, but an accompanying storm surge also can cause significant flood damage. Hurricanes also can spawn tornadoes. This combination can equate to significant and even complete loss of properties.

And we've all seen the damage done to homes after a fire, flood, or earthquake. These events are called "disasters" for a reason. The structural integrity of a home can be severely damaged by any of these, leaving it uninhabitable.

Homeowners should purchase the right type of insurance to protect their homes and property in the event of a disaster. However, home insurance gets tricky, and not all disasters are covered. As the finance blog MarketWatch explains, "For homeowners, what precisely caused the damage to their home will prove important for insurance purposes, because coverage will depend on how the damage was caused. During a hurricane, if high winds cause roof damage that leads to significant water accumulation within the house, insurance will likely cover it. But if a nearby river crests because of heavy rainfall and then causes flooding, the damage to homes will only be covered if the owners have flood insurance."

Therefore, it's critical to have the right types of insurance — especially if you purchase a home in an area where natural disasters are more likely to occur. As Forbes explains, "homeowners should be aware of the potential catastrophes that could occur in their area, so they can properly insure themselves against damages."

If you suspect or are dealing with fraud after a natural disaster, contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud at 1-866-720-5721.

If you need help with insurance or want to know what you are covered for, contact our Home Insurance Department here at ABM at 281-448-3040.

Building Your Credit

By Janet Berry-Johnson, CPA

Whether you're looking to build credit for the first time or rebuild credit after a few money missteps, you're probably facing a common conundrum: you need credit to have a credit score, but you need a good credit score to get approved for loans and credit cards.

How to build credit from scratch

Let's launch right in. If you're new to credit and need to establish credit from scratch, here are a few things you can do to get started:

1 - Open a credit account

The first step in building credit is to open a credit account. You may have to start with a secured credit card or a credit builder loan. The very first time you apply for credit, the lender will order a credit report. That first inquiry establishes your credit report.

2 - Pay your bills on time

This includes everything from credit cards and loans to rent payments, utilities, and cell phone plans. Even accounts that aren't normally reported to a credit bureau can negatively impact your credit score if they're referred to a collection agency.

3 - Apply for new credit cautiously

When you apply for new credit, the lender will check your credit, resulting in a "hard inquiry" on your credit report. Hard inquiries bring down your credit score, especially if you open several new lines of credit within a short time frame.

If you're shopping for a loan, such as a car loan or mortgage, credit rating agencies expect you to shop around for the best rates. For that reason, they ignore multiple inquiries for the same type of loan made within a 30 day period.

4 - Monitor your credit

Get in the habit of checking your credit report regularly. Analyze it for inaccurate information and dispute any incorrect information with the credit reporting agency immediately. Ultimately though, building credit is more of a marathon than a sprint – it just takes time. In fact, credit scoring company FICO requires someone to have at least six months of credit history before they will even calculate their credit score.

Meet Our Representatives...



Debora Taylor

Debora Taylor joins us with a wealth of experience having worked in the employee benefit field for over 25 years. Debora has handled everything from individual to over 15,000 lives. Customer service is the most important part of this industry for her and she has "the buck stops here" mentality. Debora is married with an adult son. They have traveled extensively by both RV and boating during their free time.

ABM Bad Joke Of The Month...

Why did the power line not go to prom?

She was grounded



Continued from page 4

How do I build credit responsibly?

While we've covered the general rules for how to build credit, let's get into some more specific tools you use to build it. The first step in building credit is to apply for your first credit account.

For many people, their first credit application is for a credit card. But without any credit history, you may not qualify for one of the major credit card issuers such as Visa or MasterCard. The good news is, there are other ways to start building a responsible credit history without a credit card.

Here are 7 alternatives to traditional, unsecured credit cards:

- Store card
- Secured card
- Credit builder loans
- Certificate of Deposit-insured loan
- Student loan
- Co-signer
- Authorized user



1 - Store card

Retail store cards have a reputation for approving applicants with no credit. You're more likely to get accepted for a card that can only be used at one store, or a group of stores, than a card that can be used anywhere.

To get started with a retail store card, ask your favorite retailer about their options, or check out this post on the five best store credit cards to build credit.

2 - Secured credit card

Secured credit cards require a security deposit and often give you a line of credit equal to your deposit. Once you start using the card, the issuer sends you monthly statements. If you don't pay your bill, the issuer can take the money you owe from your deposit.

Once you've demonstrated you can handle your card responsibly, the issuer may allow you to have a higher credit line than your deposit or upgrade to an unsecured card and refund the deposit.

3 - Credit builder loans

Credit builder loans are another option for building credit.

Similar to a secured credit card, many lenders that offer credit builder loans collect a deposit and give you a credit limit equal to the deposit amount. Your deposit goes into a savings account that you cannot access until you've fully repaid the loan. As long as you pay as agreed, the lender sends a favorable report to the credit bureaus.

You can find these types of loans at a local credit union, or through Self, which is the first company to make these types of loans available online or via mobile app in all 50 states. Another positive about

Continued from page 5

choosing Self? You don't have to make a security deposit to be approved for the loan.

4 - A Certificate of Deposit-insured loan

A Certificate of Deposit (CD) is a financial product similar to a savings account, but you agree to keep your money with the bank for a fixed period of time. In return for letting the bank hold onto your money, you receive higher interest rates than you would from a savings account.

To use that CD to build credit, some banks let you use the funds in your CD as collateral for a loan. The loan shows up on your credit report as a secured loan, and helps you build credit when you make on-time payments. Credit unions sometimes call these share-secured loans.

5 - Student loans

Getting approved for federal student loans does not depend on credit, but managing your student loans well will impact your credit score.

Remember, whether you make your payments on time, make your payments late, or miss your payments completely, your payment history on student loans gets reported to the credit bureaus.

6 - Co-signer

If you can't get approved for credit on your own, you may have a parent or other close relative who is willing to co-sign on a loan in your name. Having a co-signer with excellent credit may help you get a lower interest rate than you would on your own.

As you make on-time payments, you build your credit. However, if you default (don't pay) on your account, the lender will go after your co-signer to collect the debt.

7 - Authorized user

To get a credit card completely on your own, you must be at least 21 years old. While you can get a card as young as 18, at that age you must either have a co-signer or proof of steady income to qualify. If you do this, be sure to pick a relative that has a strong credit score, a history of on-time payments and low credit utilization. Becoming an authorized user on an account with a history of missed payments could harm your score rather than improve it.

However, if you're under age 18 and want to start building credit, your parents may be able to add you as an authorized user on their credit card. Users over the age of 18 can also take advantage of being an authorized user.

Banks have their own minimum age requirements for adding a minor as an authorized user, so parents should call the number on the back of their card to ask about age requirements.

How to protect yourself and loved ones from Measles.

As the measles outbreak continues in the U.S., with more cases reported since the disease was declared eliminated in 2000, concern grows among public health officials, people who are immunocompromised and parents of young children. That's because measles can cause very serious complications, especially in children under 5 years of age. These can include pneumonia,



Continued from page 4

encephalitis and even death. Measles—also called rubeola—is caused by an extremely contagious, long-lasting virus which is spread through the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The measles virus can live up to two hours after a person who has coughed or sneezed leaves the area.



According to the CDC, 22 states have reported cases of measles this year. The largest outbreaks are occurring in Rockland county, New York; Washington state; New Jersey; Butte County, California; and Michigan. The infections were initially acquired as a result of travel abroad but have spread in the U.S. due to low immunization rates in certain communities.

Additional states reporting cases include Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, Oregon, Tennessee, and Texas. Most cases are affecting unvaccinated people younger than 19 years of age.

To ensure that you and your loved ones are unaffected by this outbreak, pay attention for initial symptoms of measles, which include:

- High fever
- Cough
- Runny nose
- Red, watery eyes (conjunctivitis)

Additionally, three to five days after the start of symptoms, a rash breaks out, beginning as flat red spots on the face, hairline, and spreading downward to the neck, trunk, arms, legs and feet. Smaller bumps also may appear on top of the flat red spots and become joined together as they spread. The fever may increase to as high as 104 degrees Fahrenheit when the rash appears.

Infected people can spread measles to others between four days before and four days after the rash appears.

Because the measles virus is highly contagious, health departments and physicians are urging anyone who thinks they may be falling ill with measles to contact their primary care provider before appearing in an office, urgent care center or emergency room.

“I can’t stress enough the importance of prevention through the very effective measles vaccination,” said William Fried, M.D., Senior Director, Aetna Clinical Solutions.

There is no specific treatment for measles. Supportive care recommendations include rest, fluids and acetaminophen for fever. The good news is that a safe and effective vaccine is available to prevent measles. It is recommended that children receive the vaccine in two doses: the first between the ages of 12 and 15 months and the second between the ages of 4 and 6 years old. Adults born after 1956 without evidence of immunity should also receive at least one dose of the vaccine, preferably within 3 days of exposure. Catch-up vaccination for unvaccinated children and adolescents is 2 doses at least 4 weeks apart.

Stay healthy this winter. Don’t forget to get your flu shot this year as well.



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I have been using ABM insurance for 2.5 years and happy with their customer service. They will beat any market price.

— Bek A.

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Mike's Notes Pg 2

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ABM Bad Joke of the month Pg 5

How to protect yourself and loved ones from Measles Pg 6-7

Referral program Pg 8

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ABM Referral Program

Be sure to ask ABM about our bonus referral program which rewards our clients who send us business with \$25 Visa Gift card to use at your favorite store or restaurant.



www.getagreatquote.com

ABM offers \$25 gift certificate for those who refer a client to us and they buy a policy with ABM.



Pictures of ABM Staff at Halloween!

