

Become Involved in Financial Literacy Education

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Financial Education Works

In September, I had the great pleasure to appear with the Honorable John C. Ninfo II, Chief Bankruptcy Judge for the Western District of New York, before an energetic and high-spirited audience of 500 students at West Bloomfield High School in West Bloomfield, MI. Judge Ninfo gave a captivating presentation based on the Credit Abuse Resistance Program he has developed, for use by volunteers in the bankruptcy community, to teach students the basics of personal money management.

Also attending the presentation were the Honorable Steven Rhodes, Chief Bankruptcy Judge for the Eastern District of Michigan, and Marion “Joe” Mack, Jr., the Assistant U.S. Trustee in our Detroit office. We received invaluable assistance and support from the local school district officials and high school administrators, who recognized the import of this topic and invited us to bring this important message to the students.

The high school students in West Bloomfield may have arrived in the auditorium expecting a dry recitation of budgeting basics, but Judge Ninfo held them in rapt attention with his riveting anecdotes, drawn from years on the bankruptcy bench, of the dire consequences of financial illiteracy and mismanagement of money. Judge Ninfo’s message to the students included the following key points: (1) Basic financial education can help consumers protect their future by enabling them to avoid stressful debt and possible bankruptcy; and (2) Students in particular need to understand that new technologies, which reduce our use of cash and increase our use of plastic and other convenient means of purchasing, require new skills in personal restraint and financial planning.

Become Involved!

Since I became EOUST Director in March 2002 I have appeared and spoken at more events than I can remember, but I can honestly state that the West Bloomfield High School outreach event was one of the highlights. To have the chance, however brief, to affect young lives and guide listeners toward financial productivity and prudence was truly gratifying.

I urge you to pursue—or create—financial education outreach opportunities in your own community. Many resources are available to you, including the materials from Judge Ninfo’s CARE Program (www.careprogram.us), the curriculum and materials from the Trustees’ Education Network (www.nactt.org), and the U.S. Trustee Program’s informational brochure posted in the “Outreach” section of the U.S. Trustee Program’s website (www.usdoj.gov/ust).

Financial Literacy and Education Commission Update

The Financial Literacy Education Commission is another resource for financial education information. Created in December 2003 by the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions (FACT), the Commission held its third meeting on September 22. At this meeting, the Commission announced that a national website and toll-free hotline for financial literacy information will be launched on October 12. Visitors to the website and callers to the hotline will be offered a free “tool-kit” from the National Citizen Information Center, which will include financial management brochures from several agencies.

The Commission also announced that it is seeking public comments relating to its mandate to develop a national strategy for financial literacy. This request for comments is published in the *Federal Register* at 69 Fed. Reg. 52538 (Aug. 26, 2004). **The deadline for comments is October 31.** Specifically, the Commission seeks comments on these three questions: “(1) What are the three most important issues that the national strategy should address, and why? (2) What existing resources may be used to address those issues, and how could they be employed? (3) What are the best ways to improve financial literacy and financial education in the United States?” I’m confident that, as bankruptcy practitioners, we have well-grounded and valuable opinions on these issues.

The Commission’s next meeting is January 13, 2004. I encourage you to keep abreast of the Commission’s activities, including the development of the national strategy to promote financial literacy education, through the Treasury Department’s website at www.treasury.gov/financialeducation.