

## *How can your credit union membership help you avoid financial pitfalls?*

### *Essay #1*

Becoming a member of the credit union is a smart way to learn about financial management and to save money to prepare for financial emergencies. Thank God that my mom taught me at an early age about saving money and its benefits. She taught me about some of the benefits that my credit union offered including savings and checking accounts, student visa accounts, and the use of the free coin machine to cash in and deposit my coins. Since the age of ten my mom would give me a bi-weekly allowance and she made me put some money in my credit union account. She told me that I should always save for a rainy day. When it came to finances, there were some rainy days and personal financial pitfall stories that I would like to share.

"Rain with a Chance of Sunshine" ... I remember a time when my savings, "saved me from what I considered a financial pitfall". My rainy day came, when I was about fifteen years old and I found out that my favorite singer was coming to town but my mom said that she could not buy me a ticket because she did not have the money. All my friends were going except me. I remembered thinking that my mom might be in a financial bind but her bind was not my bind. I reminded her that I had saved approximately \$200 in my account and would be able to buy my own ticket. The sun came out when my mom allowed me to withdraw my money from the credit union to purchase my ticket to the show. That was a great lesson for me because there were times before that when I wanted to spend the money but my mom recommended that I leave the money in my account. After that lesson, I continued to save and was able to rebuild my cash reserve.

"Cloudy with a chance of a Beetle?" ... My mom who was a single parent had some financial pitfalls but she always saved for just about all upcoming events. Towards the end of my junior year of high school everyone was ordering their school rings and our ring dance was nearing. My mom told me that she did not have the money to buy me a school ring because she was trying to save for something very important. She graduated in 1980 and I was an upcoming 2008 graduate. My mom gave me her school ring which had a small inscription of 19 on one side and 80 on the other side. She told me that the ring styles had not changed much over the years so I wore it and not many people noticed that I had a 1980 ring instead of a 2008 ring. Although I was a little embarrassed, my mom and I had a great sense of humor and I soon realized what my mom was saving for. Later that year for my sixteenth birthday my mom bought me a bright Red 1998 Volkswagen Beetle. She took out a \$4000 credit union loan to buy my car. If it wasn't for her good credit standing with the credit union she would not been able to buy my car. By the way, I'm still wearing her school ring today!

"Thunderstorms with a promise of rainbows" ... My mom told me that since I was four years old and through payroll deduction, she had been saving a small amount for my college education. My mom had a financial setback when in my last year of high school I had a stroke caused by an Arteriovenous Malformation (AVM) in my brain. I had to undergo physical, occupational and speech therapy. This unexpected and sudden illness left my mom with an overwhelming amount of hospital bills so she had to use most of the money saved for college to pay hospital bills that her health insurance did not cover. The rainbow came when I eventually recovered and was able to return to school that year. I had brain

surgery in June 2008 and was able attend college in August 2008. Also, I was able to use my credit union savings to help pay for my first year of college activities that I knew my mom could not afford.

There were many lessons regarding the important of savings to prepare for unexpected financial pitfalls. Thankfully my lessons were learned early and these lessons have taught me to save for rainy days, build good credit and to join your local credit union to take advantage of all the financial offers that could save you from financial storms.

## *Essay #2*

The symbiotic relationship between the credit union and its members' is the key to the credit unions' and members' financial success. Unlike a bank where profit motivation for shareholders takes precedence, a credit unions loyalty is with its members who offer them the financial stability to provide services. As such, credit unions desire their members to be well-informed with regard to financial matters to minimize their risks in making financial decisions. The credit unions offer many services to help members make the choices best suited to their financial needs without taking significant risks. By doing this, credit unions can maintain better liquidity, because their members are managing their money in such a manner as to prevent early termination, foreclosure, or failure to pay on the financial vehicles offered to them. Furthermore, if the occasion should arise where a member comes into an unforeseen situation, my credit union is more likely to work with me to help solve the situation than walk away. Knowing this, I feel more empowered to make appropriate financial decisions because I know if I have questions or concerns, my credit union will be there to assist me. Also, since they take a more conservative approach to lending, they can offer better lending rates, and competitive dividends compared to the banking industry.

As a young college student preparing for my future, I realized it was important to select a financial institution that would stand by me as I tackle the financial difficulties of obtaining my degree, and transition with me as I begin earning in the workforce. When I was making my decision, I was looking around at the financial landscape and due to the tumultuous times, I must admit, I was somewhat concerned on whether my financial institution would exist five to ten years from now. With all of the recent attention given to the failures within the banking industry in the past year, I decided to do my own research to determine the best financial institution for me. During this research I came across information regarding the savings and loan crisis of the late 1980's and early 1990's. I realized that the credit union and the savings and loan industry had faced the same level of devastation in the eighties that we are seeing in the banking industry today. The credit unions survived that crisis and learned from their experiences. That knowledge gave me some assurance that the credit union that I have chosen will be there for me when I need it now, after graduation, and to support all of my future goals and endeavors.

In addition to all the benefits mentioned above with regard to being a member rather than a customer, and the confidence that my credit union will survive through troubled times, I quickly realized that there

were some specific financial incentives as well. I noticed that banks charged fees on any service they provided, even to simply open/maintain an account. Contrary to this practice, the credit union I choose provided me with a \$125.00 credit to my account for joining, no monthly fees and a minimal \$5.00 to maintain the account compared to hundreds and in some cases thousands of dollars required by banks. It's no wonder, with these diametrically opposed business practices, that the younger generation is flocking to credit unions as their financial services solution.

During my research, it became clear that many banks have started to adopt credit union like capabilities in an attempt to curb the flow of customers to credit unions. It occurred to me that if the banks feel they must model their business practices after credit unions to survive, it would be illogical for me to settle for anything less than the original concept of operations that is captured in the credit unions of today! With that being said, I feel fortunate that my employer had the foresight to offer their employees the option of becoming a member of a credit union. Without that decision, I would have been forced to settle for a financial services solution less capable of helping me avoid the plethora of financial pitfalls offered by less capable financial institutions.

### *Essay #3*

When I began to write this essay and started thinking how I benefit from credit unions, I thought of the movie, "It's a Wonderful Life." Though in the movie the lending institution was a savings and loan, I think the message also applies to credit unions. In the movie, there is a run on the banks and people demand their money; all of it. George Bailey, the proprietor of the savings and loan tells them that money is not kept onsite. The crowd gets angry and they don't understand. He tells them that their money has been used for the greater good of the community, that is, the money has been invested in the community so people can build their dream home, take out loans for emergency needs, and the like. Being part of a local team, a team that is interested and vested in the community, is what credit unions are all about. When you become a member of that credit union team, you immediately become part of that community that George Bailey spoke about; a financial partner and friend for life. Credit unions have a network of financial counselors and advisors that spring into action when you join. These professionals are our neighbors who stand prepared and armed with information and programs that help ensure your financial growth and stability; helping you avoid the financial pitfalls. No matter your age, credit unions have programs designed for the various stages in one's life. Whether you are just opening a savings account as a child, learning how to save to buy the things you want as a teenager, or preparing for retirement, your local credit union is there to help!

For me personally, the credit union has been there to teach, guide, and ease me into the adult financial world. The credit union has online interactive tutorials that guide you, using a step-by-step, interactive process for your needs, e.g., to determine the cost of college and applying for financial aid. As a young person who is close to turning eighteen, credit unions offer programs that will allow me to open a checking account and credit card account that will help teach me how to manage money and establish

good credit. The credit union counselors are available to talk to online, in person, or over the phone, to help me with any problem I may have; always looking for new and innovative ways to help protect and secure my financial future.

They are partners who want to see me succeed. Credit union counselors are there to help monitor your accounts to help you avoid financial pitfalls, like being overdrawn on your checking account or going over your credit card limit or being too far in debt. Credit unions have these built-in controls that are designed to keep you informed to ensure your financial success.

These programs are just a small part of the total credit union offerings. In addition to the above programs, credit unions offer financial workshops that provide hands-on guidance that help you learn in a caring environment. In these workshops you can learn through trial and error, ask the questions that you need answers to, and then follow-up on a one-to-one, personal basis. Credit unions offer online information and advice for all of your financial needs, explaining things in a very simple manner without all of the confusing terms. Credit unions want you to succeed financially because when you succeed the entire community shares in your success.

Having friends looking out for your financial welfare is important because we often tend to act before seeking good advice. Instead of rushing to buy a car or house and, not knowing for sure whether or not you can really afford it, credit union professionals are there to make sure that you have all of the necessary information before signing on the dotted line. Credit unions will review your credit score and let you know what the numbers stand for. They offer tutorials, programs, counseling, and personalized service to not only advise but also to teach so you will be able to afford that new car or house you've always wanted. In fact, because credit unions, unlike banks, are not-for-profit, they don't want to be just a place where you got your loan; they want to be your partner, the home for all of your financial needs. All it takes is that first step – join today – you'll be glad you did. I know I am!

#### *Essay #4*

Some people may answer this question hypothetically, but I can answer it from my own and my family's real life experiences of how our credit union has helped us to avoid financial pitfalls. I have very early memories as a little girl of the excitement of opening my own special savings club account for children at the credit union. When my source of income in those days came in the form of checks sent in birthday or holiday cards from grandparents or aunts and uncles, it was tempting to want to use that money for the latest toy or game. However, it was more fun to accompany my mom on a special trip to our local branch of the credit union and get a sticker in my special pass book and earn prizes. I also had a piggy bank with the credit union logo on it where I would keep any loose change I happened to come across. Again, it was tempting to break into that bank when I heard the sound of the ice cream truck, but more fun to feed those coins into the credit union's free coin machine and see how much I had saved. As I entered high school and got my first paying job as a summer camp counselor, I kept aside some mad money each pay day, but deposited the rest into my credit union savings account and watched it grow as I learned about compound interest. Later on in high school, I began to do some modeling work and

opened a separate club account which I aptly named “Modeling” to save money from my modeling jobs. When I start college in a few short months, I know my credit union will be there for me as well as I turn 18 and get my first credit card and checking account, and the credit union will have the safeguards in place to help me make wise decisions and establish a good credit history. If I need help with financing my college education, they will be there as well, with education loans. In an MSNBC.com article, “Financial advice for incoming college freshmen”, tip #7 is “Bank wisely.” It states that the bank you choose should provide free checking, on-line bill paying, and many ATMs in the area to avoid ATM fees. My credit union has all those features and many more.

Throughout my life, my parents have been good financial role models, and I have watched as they have benefited from the many products and services each of their credit unions has to offer, to include financing and refinancing their mortgage, making investments, attending free seminars on many different financial topics, obtaining a home equity loan to build a screened-in porch and deck on the back of our house, buying vehicles, etc. I have seen them go from receiving hard copy statements in the mail, to receiving those same statements electronically, signing up for home banking, and bill payment on line. Whenever a financial issue of any kind comes up, they inevitably say, “Let’s check with credit union.” And it’s comforting to know that if they were ever to need it, free and confidential financial counseling services are available.

I know my life’s journey is just beginning. I am fortunate that I will have lifetime membership in the credit union. Certified Financial Planner s are available to help me plan and keep me on the right track as I get my first apartment, buy my own first car, etc. I will be able to rely on the credit union’s many excellent employees and resources at every upcoming stage in my life to avoid any financial pitfalls. Thank you, credit union!

## *Essay #5*

### The Fairytale of the Credit Union

Once upon a time there was a little princess named Emma. Whenever she received money as a gift, she would rush out to buy the newest jewel encrusted tiara, which she would tire of in a few days. She yearned to be able to purchase a full-fledged crown, but she could never save up enough money to buy one. Her real story began when she was introduced to the opportunity to start a savings account at a credit union.

By depositing a little bit of money each time she received any, Emma's little credit union account grew steadily. Since credit unions are not for profit, they can afford to give higher interest rates than banks, so Emma earned a lot of interest on her savings over the next few years. The friendly people at the credit union and the advice they gave her on saving money were extremely helpful. With their

support, over several years she put away enough money to buy her treasured crown. Emma's credit union had helped her overcome her first financial pitfall by teaching her how to save up her money.

Several years later, imagine Emma in high school. After receiving her driver's license, she wants to buy a new car so she doesn't have to depend on her parents as much. Again her credit union steps in to help by offering her an automobile loan with low interest rates. A helpful credit union employee also meets with Emma to talk about her budget and savings plan. Together, they discuss how she will save money to go to college, and also plan out how much money she can set aside just for hanging out with her friends and shopping. While some of Emma's friends use all of their money on movies, she plans out how she will use her own money to cover everything she wants to get, as well as putting some in savings. After the meeting, the agent helps Emma start a debit card so that she doesn't have to carry around cash when she goes out. With a new car and a lot of sound savings advice, Emma is prepared for college.

Going to a university is a big step in Emma's life. Again, the credit union helps her to get a low interest rate loan, this time to pay for a computer. An employee advises her to start directly depositing her paychecks into her account, and she does so with positive results. Within a few months, she has already saved up more money than ever before. With help from the credit union staff, she learns how to understand a credit report and decides to get her first credit card. While her classmates are being caught in the financial pitfalls of credit card debt, overdraft fees, and past due notices, Emma's easy online reminders of bills and lower interest rates from the credit union make it easy for her to improve her credit score in order to prepare herself and her finances for some of the next big financial steps in her life.

After she graduates, Emma again relies on her trusty credit union to help her finance the mortgage on her new condominium. The credit union website is full of helpful features for her to use in planning her growing budget, including checklists of expenses and payment calculators. As her list of bills grows, the credit union employees are there to advise her along the way on all of her questions. Soon after she moves into her newly bought condominium, Emma becomes engaged to marry a wonderful man. Once again, she uses resources from the credit union to start saving up money for her wedding and preparing to merge their accounts. The helpful advice on the website safely guides her and her husband through potential financial problems of newlyweds.

A few years later, Emma and her husband have a baby boy. When he is old enough, she helps him start a credit union account similar to the one she has had since she was young. He grows up with sound financial sense, and makes his way through his education and out of the house without encountering any major financial problems. Several years later, Emma and her husband retire. Thanks to reliable methods of retirement savings suggested once again by their credit union, they have enough money to retire peacefully to a small castle in the country, where they live happily ever after.

Money matters. And not just in today's perilously uncertain economic times. Even if the economy were booming, managing money and saving smart would still be important. After all, emergencies come up unexpectedly and it's important to be prepared. Luckily, my credit union helps me with just these two essential activities—in good times or bad—so that I may avoid financial pitfalls and problems.

I recently opened three new club accounts with my credit union, in addition to the two I already had. Club accounts are one of the unique opportunities offered by credit unions to help their members save money. My club accounts are entitled, "Groceries, Books, Moving Out Savings, Spending, and Others." In this way I can set aside money for each of my expenses, without mixing them up. Thanks to the transaction history available online, I can see exactly what I have added and what I have spent from each account. This kind of micro-management allows me to save conscientiously.

Speaking of transaction histories, online banking is another excellent resource in my credit union's repertoire of money management tools. I can keep track of exactly how much money is in each account, and check my transaction history any time of the day or night. This helps me to plan my budget, make my weekly grocery runs, and figure out if I have enough money for larger purchases. The 24-hour access is great because between taking 14 credits, working two jobs, and having an internship, my schedule is hectic to say the least. This way I can take care of money matters when it is convenient for me, instead of overspending because I did not have time to check my balance during bank hours—a major financial pitfall for many.

Being able to transfer money online is perfect for busy weeks at school. When my mom picks up extra groceries for me, I can simply transfer the \$20 online to her account, which saves me an extra trip to the bank. Or when I have a bad work week and am tight on cash, Dad can slip me an extra \$10 for gas. Online transfer is great for making sure I pay my parents back promptly too. Being able to stay on top of paying my parents back helps me build good credit habits, which are essential for avoiding major debt.

Thanks to my credit union I am also able to have a credit card as an employed 18 year old. It is very difficult to get a credit card at this age, especially with the new laws being passed by Congress. Building my credit is an important way to prepare for events like getting an apartment after college, getting a new car, or (eventually) buying my first home. Also, thanks to both online banking and low interest rates, I am able to keep my credit score up and my debt down. Low interest means that if I cannot pay something off in one month, it will not cost an excessive amount to pay it off over two to three months. In addition, online banking allows me to pay my credit card bill way ahead of time by simply transferring the money from one of my accounts onto my credit card.

Just a few weeks ago I opened my very first Roth IRA. By beginning to save for retirement at a young age, I am beginning to prepare for life down the road. My credit union helps me avoid a major problem that many young adults fall into--not saving for retirement--by offering great interest rates.

My credit union offers excellent saving tools that allow me to plan for the future, and handy money-management options that allow me to stay on top of my finances. By helping me tackle any major financial pitfalls, my credit union is putting me far ahead in a world where being economically savvy is a necessity.

## *Essay #7*

My credit union membership helps me avoid financial pitfalls by teaching me how to achieve a balance between saving and spending. Through my credit union account I have learned the mechanics of check writing, bill payment, and basic bookkeeping. It has also led me to appreciate the need to avoid frivolous expenditures and avert the accumulation of credit card indebtedness. The Teen Scene pamphlets, which offer relevant guidance and tips focused upon habits specifically relevant to teens, have proven to be particularly useful. The credit union's monthly publication has also made me aware that there exists a number of different vehicles available to maximize savings as well as myriad sources for borrowing, both short term and long.

Saving money is especially difficult for a teenage girl like myself who loves to shop. However, the information received as a consequence of my credit union membership has served to reinforce the lessons of fiscal responsibility which my parents have attempted to instill in me from an early age. For instance, by establishing a savings goal which forces me to set aside a portion of my part time earnings, I will be better able to address future financial emergencies. Being aware that savings may not always be sufficient to satisfy future needs such that borrowing may be necessary, I have learned to always pay my bills on time to enhance the likelihood that credit will be available when the need arises. One such critical need is that of college education financing, which has led me to seek this scholarship.

Despite the many helpful tips I have received, the most helpful one was to create a budget. In order for this to be successful, it was necessary to contemplate the sources and amounts of anticipated income. This was rather simple since I am a full time student, two season athlete, and active in community service, thereby reducing earning opportunities. Thus, my income is largely a product of a monthly allowance supplemented by earnings derived from a part time job. Next, I kept track of my spending habits for a few weeks by retaining all receipts. This not only enabled me to ascertain the amount of spending, but how the money was being spent. Only then could I identify wasteful spending and set a reasonable savings goal.

In one of the Teen Scene pamphlets they categorized expenses as either "fixed" or "variable". "Fixed" expenses are those that recur on a periodic basis and are not truly discretionary, whereas "variable" expenses are subject to fluctuation in frequency and/or amount. "Variable" expenses are more likely influenced by whim, and are quite often avoidable in whole or in part. This distinction helped me immensely in deciding which variable expenses I could afford and which I needed to avoid, or at least, defer.

Through my credit union membership I now understand how to use credit cards wisely and the importance of good credit. Additionally, I appreciate how to maintain my checking account. Most importantly, I have learned how to budget my income and how to spend my money wisely by deciding between my needs and wants. My credit union, working cooperatively with my parents, has permitted me the opportunity to take on financial responsibilities. Hopefully, learning and employing the basics of finance at an early age has equipped me with the tools to avoid financial pitfalls later in life. My credit

union membership has provided me with the lessons to grow into a responsible and financially successful adult.

### *Essay #8*

In today's tough economy financial pitfalls are everywhere. These pitfalls can be experienced when making large purchases such as vehicles or homes. Financial problems are also commonly caused by poor planning and the misuse of funds. For example, budgeting money incorrectly or buying more than you can afford with a credit card can lead to financial problems. However, at my Credit Union you can overcome these problems very easily with the many products and services that they provide for their members.

Often times when someone spends above their means with credit cards a couple of things might happen. They could accumulate a vast amount of credit card debt causing their credit score to fall sharply, or they could have something that they own foreclosed or repossessed because they are unable to make the payments. However, with membership in my credit union I can breathe a little easier knowing that I am in good hands. My Credit Union has special programs in place that will help me avoid bad situations like the one's described above. For example, they provide a financial counseling service where members receive advice about budgeting, debt repayment, understanding their credit score with tips to improve it, and even help to avoid bankruptcy, repossession and foreclosure.

Due to the high price of a college education, preparing for college financially can be a very thorny process. Many people often take on large amounts of student loans to get through college. This approach to pay for college is a major pitfall for anyone who chooses to take it. These loans usually take an extremely long time to pay off and they put a damper on future financial purchases because of the high balances required to meet today's tuition requirements. Luckily, my credit union has made this process incredibly simple and straight forward with their college planning service. My credit union helps students pay for college with their five step program. They help with identifying sources for college financial planning such as free aid, personal assets and cash, education loans, and secured and unsecured personal loans. My credit union will walk me through its program and help me find the financial fit that is right for me. They even will help me avoid college loans that are too high risk and could do more harm than good to my financial future.

Because of the turbulent economy that we are currently experiencing, the amount of finances needed for retirement is not as cut and dry as it used to be. What was once enough money to retire with years ago is now not nearly enough. Even as a young adult it is never too early to begin to think about retirement. With my credit union I can start to plan for my retirement now. I can take advantage of their excellent retirement savings assistance plan to help me save enough to retire comfortably. For members that already have a retirement savings plans with an employer, my credit union will even review what they currently have and suggest adjustments to ensure financial security when they retire.

In today's complex financial world it's good to know that my credit union is able to help guide me at the very beginning of my financial life and grow with me as my needs change. As I enter the college phase of my life, what I now require from my financial institution is not the same as it was five, three or even two years ago. I've gone from basic savings account needs to checking accounts and debit cards. My goals and aspirations for the future will lead me to require even more sophisticated products and services such as loans and investments and eventually retirement accounts. My Credit Union has all of the tools that I will need to help me have a bright financial future.

### *Essay #9*

Be Prepared. Every young Boy Scout learns this valuable motto, but this is a great financial philosophy to live by as well. Avoiding financial pitfalls is extremely important to college students, especially students like me who are entering their senior year. Soon I will be graduating, getting a job, possibly even buying a home, and I will need to prepare myself for new financial situations that can be devastating if not handled carefully. Fortunately, my credit union offers many programs that can help members plan strategies to save money and make wise decisions.

One way to prepare for a strong financial future is to take advantage of the many services the credit union makes available to its members. By first checking out the credit union's rates on credit cards, student loans, automobile loans, and other financial products, members can avoid the pitfall of overpaying when borrowing money. High interest rates on loans and credit cards can lead to higher debt and difficulties repaying loans. The credit union is a "not for profit" company, which allows it to provide lower fees, higher returns, and lower interest rates. ATM transaction fees are also lower, and an entire network of ATM machines is available. My credit union's caring mission statement assures members they are not getting nickled and dimed for the company's profit.

My credit union also offers numerous educational programs that can help members prepare strategies to improve their financial status and avoid costly mistakes when encountering major decisions. The credit union holds seminars and provides an on-line learning center packed with information about the best ways to budget expenses, buy a car, purchase a house, and even start a new business. The website contains a car buying guide with a step by step process to get the best price as well as obtain the best quality vehicle for the money spent. Purchasing a car is an important decision that could cost lots of money in the long term if the buyer is unprepared. Many of these seminars are geared toward young people like me, who have never had to make such a major purchase. The website also provides a guide with advice on purchasing a house, in addition to the seminars during which members can learn from real people and ask questions. Obtaining home buying advice is beneficial from a money saving perspective, but more importantly people need to make sure they are comfortable with the house their family is going to live in. The credit union can help buyers choose from innovative and low risk mortgage plans if they need a loan. Failing to plan for the future can be another major financial pitfall, resulting in lack of sufficient funds at retirement age or mishandled estates. Over the past year, my credit

union has offered educational classes on understanding investment opportunities and an estate planning session, both of which help members prepare for the future and ensure that money will go to loved ones. Seminars such as these are excellent educational opportunities which allow members to learn from the experiences of others and therefore avoid making mistakes.

In addition to providing services and educational programs, the credit union also offers more unique benefits such as business networking opportunities. A program called the Small Business University encourages members to meet and discuss topics relevant to small businesses. As a Health Administration major, one of my goals is to create a small health awareness business in the future and this would be a great resource to prepare myself for this challenge. Listening to entrepreneurs and taking in feedback from people who have been through the process means I can identify the tools required to be successful. Business networking is another plus that the credit union generously offers at no cost.

The credit union will help me avoid financial pitfalls because of the options that will help me be prepared. The best way to evade bad credit and costly mistakes is to be prepared for every situation by planning effective strategies. The best way to be prepared is to make use of the education seminars, networking programs, and the low rates that the credit union offers.

### *Essay #10*

There are many messages and advertisements that bombard us each day that influence how we spend our money and how we spend money we have not even earned yet, through the use of credit. The common element in these messages is that “more”, “bigger” and “new” is the desired goal. We are tempted to believe that “want” is the same thing as “need.” There are financial pitfalls such as the lack of saving funds and using credit in excess that can have very serious implications for a person’s future and their life. Bad credit can even prevent you from getting a job if the employer does a credit check. Financial pitfalls start with a few bad habits that grow into huge problems and so to avoid financial pitfalls we need information, guidance and opportunity, three things that my credit union offers.

My credit union membership provides me with information. Financial matters are very complex and ever changing to respond to the current economy and changes in law. The monthly newsletters from my credit union and the free seminars they offer provide me with information about tax credits, credit cards, keeping accounts safe, tips on how to save and consumer tips, to name a few. This information is a critical and essential element to make informed decisions to avoid pitfalls. Advertisers or store owners are not going to give out information about the possible negative effects of poor financial management so it is very important that my credit union does.

My credit union membership provides me with trained staff that is looking out for my best interest. Because credit unions are not-for-profit and are member-owned the relationship between staff and customer is different from a bank. I feel that I can trust staff from a credit union because they are less of a business and more of a service. I am never surprised by hidden or manipulative fees or gimmicks that

may lead to pitfalls. Even though I am young, I have been treated with respect when I go to the credit union.

My credit union membership also provides me with opportunity to grow my assets. I am only able to work part-time during the school year and so it is very important to me that my credit union often higher rates for interest in savings accounts and they do not have so many confusing fees, as other banks do. They also have special banking services for college students to help us manage our money and get us started on financial independence and good financial practices. My mother has her car loan and house loan with our credit union because they offered better interest rates and the process to apply was easy. My family values have taught me the importance of saving and to not want for excessive things but it is the credit union that provides me with the opportunities I need to manage my finances and avoid pitfalls.

Carl Sandburg said, “Money is power, freedom, a cushion, the sum of blessings.” In my opinion you can substitute the word “money” for “my credit union” because my credit union provides me with future financial power, freedom from excessive debt, a cushion, and the sum of blessings.