

Know what affects credit scores and how to improve your score

In today’s article I want to focus on how your credit score is determined and how you can raise it.

Your credit score is an all-important, three-digit number that determines much of your financial life. Maintaining a healthy credit profile is important because your credit rating will impact everything from whether you get a much-needed loan to what your life insurance and auto insurance rates will be. One personal finance expert calculated that an individual with terrific credit would save or earn over his or her lifetime \$1 million more than someone with bad credit.

Although there are several types of credit scores, the most popular score used by lenders is the FICO score. The FICO score gets its name from the company that developed it, Fair, Isaac Corp. FICO scores range from 300 to 850 points, and to get a peek at yours you have to pay for it – currently \$19.95 each. You can sign up for a 10-day trial service for credit monitoring for only \$14.95 but be sure to read the fine print – part of which is a three-month minimum.

Instead I recommend that you visit www.annualcreditreport.com. (Note this is not FreeCreditReport.com) This central site allows you to request a free credit file disclosure once every 12 months from each of three nationwide consumer credit reporting companies: Equifax, Experian and TransUnion. These numbers can give you a good idea what your FICO score is without having to spend

the money.

Here is a quick primer on what goes into your credit score, as well as tips you can use to positively impact your credit rating. To calculate your scores, Fair Isaac evaluates the data in your credit reports, giving payment history 35 percent, amount of debt owed 30 percent, length of credit history 15 percent, mix of credit 10 percent and inquiries or new credit 10 percent of your final score.

Here is what you need to know about each of these areas.

Payment history. If you have no late payments in your credit files, that will have an overwhelmingly positive impact on your score. But even with one or two late payments, the scoring system takes recency into account in evaluating how responsible you are at paying your bills. Therefore, a late payment three years ago won’t have as much an impact as a slip up three months ago.

Bottom line: try to always make all payments on time. Even if you can only make minimum payments, this helps guard your credit rating.

Amount of debt owed. When you’re focused on eliminating your bills, you might think that debt is debt. But the credit scoring system doesn’t treat all types



Diann Gerstner

• Knowledge for Life

of debt the same. The debt most likely to lower your scores is credit card debt – not mortgages, car loans or student loan debt. So to raise your scores, focus first on lowering outstanding credit card balances. As long as you make timely payments on other debts having those types of debts won’t negatively impact your credit scores the way existing credit card debt can. Try to keep credit card balances at or below 25 percent of your available credit. This is known as your “credit utilization ratio.” If you can pay off cards in full each month, that’s even better.

Length of credit history. All credit scoring models reward you for having a longer credit history. A word to the wise, though, about managing your credit cards in the context of your credit score. Even if you pay off a credit card in full, it’s generally best to keep the account open. Closing credit cards can backfire by decreasing the length of your credit history and raising your credit utilization ratio. If you’ll be applying for credit in the next year, shutting down existing credit cards could hurt your score. But if you don’t trust yourself with your credit cards, simply put them away – in the attic, basement, a safe or even the freezer.

Mix of credit. The credit-scor-

ing world also rewards you for showing you can responsibly juggle multiple forms of credit. Thus, your score will be higher if your credit files include various types of credit, such as a mortgage, an installment loan, like a student loan or auto loan, and credit cards. Again, as long as you pay all these obligations on time, you’ll boost your credit rating in this category.

Inquiries or new credit. A “hard” inquiry is triggered on your credit report whenever you seek credit or apply for a loan. Inquiries remain on your credit reports for two years. For FICO scores, inquiries count against you for one year. Various experts have estimated that a single inquiry can lower your credit score by anywhere from five points to 35 points. So only apply for credit when you really need it. And skip those department store credit card offers; they just generate inquiries.

A “soft” inquiry, like checking your own credit report, does not hurt your credit score. You can – and should – check your credit reports from each of the three main credit bureaus at least once a year.

You should also know that factors such as your income, race, age, gender or marital status play no role whatsoever in computing your credit scores. In fact, federal law prohibits the use of race, age, nationality, religion, sex or marital status in credit scoring.

Diann Gerstner is the family and consumer sciences agent for the Thomas County Extension office.

Deaths

R. Maxine Arendt Gilliland

R. Maxine Arendt Gilliland, 86, Colby, mother of Marlin (Nancy) Arendt of Colby, died Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2012, at the Deseret Health Care and Rehabilitation Center in Colby.

Services will be at 2 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 28, 2012, at the Williams Funeral Home in Atwood.

Memorials in her name may be left at First National Bank in Colby.

Solomon Valley 4-H Club

The monthly meeting of the Solomon Valley 4-H Club was held Jan. 9 at the 4-H building, with parents conducting the meeting.

The meeting was called to order by acting president Lori Wilson at 7 p.m. Danita Comfort, acting secretary, went through roll call with 16 parents and 21 members telling their New Year’s resolution. She then read the minutes of the November meeting which were approved as read. Ross Sloan and Greg Comfort gave officer reports for treasurer and reporter respectively.

Club leader Danita Comfort reminded members about pizza sales that were due to the club committee member Dana Wilson by Monday, Jan. 23. She also mentioned that shooting sports has started and meet at 7 p.m. every Thursday in the 4-H building. Council rep-

resentative Dana Wilson reported there was no council meeting held in December. The club had no new or unfinished business.

The program was conducted under acting Vice-President Julie Ziegelmeier. Suzie Callahan and Kristie Eberle gave project talks on horse projects while Tonya West gave a demonstration on how to tie-dye T-shirts using markers and rubbing alcohol. Doug West organized a game of tag for recreation. The meeting reconvened and Julie Ziegelmeier announced February’s meeting will be at 7 p.m. on the 13th and gave the agenda for the meeting.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Caitlyn Comfort and seconded by Trey Stramel.

Stella Ziegelmeier and Jennifer Woofert served refreshments.

– Greg Comfort, acting reporter

Crocodile invites itself in

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) – Wildlife rangers have helped an Australian family deal with an uninvited guest: a 5-foot-6-inch (1.7-meter) crocodile that wandered into their living room.

The juvenile saltwater crocodile wandered into a home in Bees Creek, a suburb of the northern Australian city of Darwin. Australian Broadcasting Corp. reported that the family found it in a partially enclosed living area after their dog’s barking woke them. Resident Jo Dodd describes

the encounter as “a very surreal moment.” She suspects the croc might been stalking the dog.

Crocodile management official Dani Best told ABC the croc might have been forced out of a nearby creek by a larger croc.

Corrections

The Colby Free Press wants to maintain an accurate record of our town. Please report any error or lack of clarity in a news story to us at 462-3963.

Pampered house plants risk salt poisoning

When fertilizer dissolves in water, it becomes a soluble salt. That can be a good-bad thing, particularly for houseplants.

“Roots can only absorb liquid meals,” explained Ward Upham, K-State Extension horticulturist. “If they receive more food than the plant needs, the leftovers simply remain in the soil.”

The water in leftover fertilizer soon evaporates, however, leaving salt behind. That’s why overfeeding can lead to a salt buildup that damages or kills plants, Upham warned. Houseplants are most at risk. They spend months or even years enclosed in the same soil and pot.

Salt damage can include wilting, scorched leaves, dropped leaves, reduced growth and dead root tips. Salt also can form a yellow-white crust on top of the soil or on the

pot itself.

Upham recommends houseplant owners take these steps to head off such results:

1. Don’t fertilize when outdoor plants are dormant. (Indoor plants respond to seasonal light changes, too.) Apply no more than the recommended amount during the growing season.

2. Water only when the soil’s top 1 to 1.5 inches is dry to the touch. Then apply until water comes out of the pot’s drainage hole.

3. Empty the saucer. Pots should not sit in water.

4. Once or twice a year, leach houseplant soil – wash out the salts. Apply twice the amount of water you’d need to fill the container. For example, a 6-inch pot can hold about 10 cups. So, you leach its soil by applying 20 cups of water – preferably outdoors or over a sink or bathtub.

“Take time, so water doesn’t overflow the rim,” Upham said. “If salt’s still crusting the surface, remove it. Or, if doing so will mean removing more than a quarter inch of the underlying soil, consider repotting with new material.”

Family members that gathered to celebrate Jaya Lynn Highland’s First Birthday were: *Great Grandparents:* Floyd & Barbara Highland, Colby; Frank Salisbury, Betty Lee, Oakley *Grandparents:* Deanna Highland, Rory & Cheryl Lee, Oakley. *Great Aunt Michele,* Great Uncle Warren & cousin Kelly Baum, Broomfield CO. *Uncle Trevor Mader,* Oakley *Aunt Kalie Highland,* Hays KS & *Felisha Mader,* Denver CO were not able to attend. *Cousin Audrey Salisbury & son Layton,* Oakley *Brother:* Ayden Carroll *Parents:* Kacey Highland & Tashia Carroll, Oakley.

Happy 1st Birthday Jaya Lynn Highland!



Jaya Lynn Highland was born January 17, 2011.

Markets

Quotes as of close of previous business day Hi-Plains Co-op	
Wheat (bushel)	\$6.36
Corn (bushel)	\$6.14
Milo (hundredweight)	\$10.50
Soybeans (bushel)	\$10.77

Rawlins County Health Center

RAWLINS COUNTY HEALTH CENTER COMMUNITY CALENDAR

707 Grant Atwood, KS 67730 (785) 626-3211

Bringing Specialized Healthcare To Your Community

February 2012

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
 ♥			1 Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab Diabetic Clinic	2 Dr. Reeves Podiatry MRI's	3 Dr. Reeves Podiatry Nuclear Medicine Cardiac Rehab	4
5	6 Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab	7 DEXA Bone Density	8 Dr. Frankum Surgery Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab Diabetic Clinic	9 MRI's	10 Cardiac Rehab	11
12	13 Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab	14 Dr. Frederick C. Miller Cardiology Mammograms	15 Dr. Curtis Cardiology Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab Diabetic Clinic	16 MRI's	17 Nuclear Medicine Cardiac Rehab	18
19	20 Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab	21 Dr. Frederick C. Miller Cardiology	22 Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab Diabetic Clinic	23 MRI'S	24 Cardiac Rehab	25
26	27 Dr. Rubinowitz Oncology Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab	28 Dr. Frederick C. Miller Cardiology	29 Ultrasounds Cardiac Rehab Diabetic Clinic	TO SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT WITH A VISITING PHYSICIAN, PLEASE CALL (785) 626-3211 Cheryl Banister, RN Specialty Clinic Director		

February is American heart Month

Dr. Babu Prasad
Radiation Oncologist

Dr. Anne O'Dea
Medical Oncologist/Hematologist

Dr. Sameh G. Abuerreish
Medical Oncologist/Hematologist

Dr. January Fields
Medical Oncologist/Hematologist

Dr. January Fields, oncologist and hematologist will see and evaluate new patients, manage patients currently receiving treatment and provide follow-up services at a new clinic in Colby.

Oncology – Dr. January Fields Monthly Citizens Medical Center Specialty Clinic 100 E. College Drive - Colby

The cancer program at HaysMed is accredited by the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer. Its fellowship-trained cancer specialists provide these state-of-the-art cancer care services:

- . Medical oncology
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- . Hematology
- . Breast Care Center
- . Cancer prevention, screening and early detection
- . Diagnosis, consultation, treatment
- . Patient support and education
- . Clinical research
- . Cancer survivorship services

To schedule an appointment or for more information, consult your primary care physician. Or call 785-623-5774 or Toll Free 1-800-248-0073 and ask for Medical Oncology.

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