

## Maximize Your Holiday Shopping Dollars

The holiday season is just around the corner! This year, the majority of Americans plan to spend up to \$1,000 or more on holiday gifts, events, meals, and other activities.<sup>1</sup> If you are among them and plan to shop by credit card, the following are ways to maximize your spending dollars – during the holiday season or anytime.

### Keep an Eye on Your Card Activity.

Credit card fraud can happen anytime, but it can be especially pervasive during the holidays. The number of Americans who say they've experienced holiday fraud doubled in 2020, according to an Experian survey.<sup>2</sup> To avoid being a victim, pay attention to how much you're spending and check your accounts routinely to make sure everything looks correct. SLFCU members can manage their debit or credit cards in online or mobile banking with our Card Controls widget. Learn more at [slfcu.org/CardControls](https://slfcu.org/CardControls).

### Shopping Online? Help Keep Your Information Safe.

More than half of U.S. shoppers (54%) plan to do at least three-quarters of their holiday shopping online in 2021.<sup>3</sup> If you're using your mobile device or computer to shop online, don't use public WiFi networks if you're entering your card information on a website. Change your passwords regularly, create strong passwords, and use different passwords for each site. Shop only on reputable sites and check that they have URLs starting with "https" (indicating a secure connection), not "http" to help keep your personal information secured.

### Cash-Back Rebates Offer Great Incentives.

It's a "gift" for you: cards that offer rebates on purchases can put money back in your wallet after the holidays and all through the year. Our Visa Signature® card offers a 1.5% monthly rebate, and our Visa Platinum® Rebate card offers a 1.0% monthly rebate. These rebates can help offset the costs of your holiday purchases.

### Promo Rates Are Great, But...

Credit card companies often make introductory "promotional rate" offers, but remember: once the

promo period is up, the interest rate often spikes upward. SLFCU members can get a card with a consistently low rate that won't disappear once the holiday trimmings have been put away.

### Get Price Protection.

If you already bought that perfect gift for someone but are worried you'll see it for a lower price somewhere else later, using a card with price protection can offer peace of mind. For example, if you buy an eligible item with your SLFCU Visa Signature credit card and find it advertised for a lower cost within 60 days of purchase, you can get reimbursed for the difference (up to \$500 per item and \$2,500 a year).\*

### Get Double the Warranty Protection.

Be smart about how you get warranty protection for higher-priced gifts. For example, Visa's Extended Warranty Protection can double the coverage on a manufacturer's warranty for up to one additional year on eligible items purchased with your Visa card. You can also register your receipt and warranty information, which can be kept on file until you need them.\* ■

1,3. QuantumMetric, 7/21/21. <https://www.quantummetric.com/blog/2021-holiday-shopping-survey>

2. Experian, 11/18/20. <https://www.experian.com/blogs/ask-experian/survey-some-consumers-would-risk-identity-theft-for-an-online-holiday-deal/>

\*Certain terms, conditions, and exclusions apply. In order for coverage to apply, you must use your covered Visa card to secure transactions. Please refer to the Visa Signature or Visa Platinum Guide to Benefits for further details.

### Cash-back on purchases just got even better!

**Visa Signature®: 1.5% monthly rebate**

**Visa Platinum® Rebate: 1.0% monthly rebate**

New cardholders who spend \$1,500 on purchases\* in the first 90 days can get a \$100 statement credit.

\*Accounts that are issued and approved will receive a \$100 statement credit upon spending \$1,500 in purchase transactions within 90 days of account opening. Cash advances, credit card checks, and balance transfers do not qualify as purchase transactions. Each account is eligible for one statement credit of \$100. Please allow four weeks after spending \$1,500 to receive the credit.



## Thank you for donating to the NM Credit Unions Connected Academy!

SLFCU members, employees, and community partners joined us to raise \$13,742.87 during our September match month to help kids continue learning while admitted to UNM Children's Hospital. All donations made to the NMCUCA go toward funding an accredited full-time teacher at UNM Mimbres School inside UNM Children's Hospital. Thank you for your generosity!

To learn more about the New Mexico Credit Unions Connected Academy, visit [slfcu.org/NMCUCA](https://slfcu.org/NMCUCA). ■



## Meet Matthew Soto – SLFCU’s New Cottonwood Branch Manager



When Matthew became an SLFCU member many years ago, he was excited to experience the values and benefits credit union membership could bring to his personal finances. “I’ve been an SLFCU member for years and I love it!” he says. His appreciation for credit union membership led Matthew to make financial services, particularly in the credit union industry, his career. “I enjoy the connection between community and responsibility that credit unions bring to the table.”

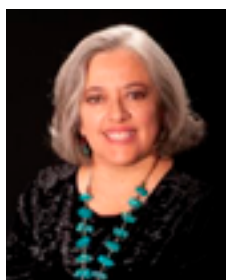
Matthew brings over 14 years of credit union experience to his new role as our Cottonwood Branch Manager. Originally from Los Lunas, Matthew attended the University of New Mexico and studied criminology and accounting. A few years after graduation, his love for finance took over, and he started working in financial services. Before joining SLFCU, he worked at two Albuquerque-area credit unions in both branch management and consumer lending.

For Matthew, it wasn’t enough to just be a member of SLFCU – he wanted to work for and with the Credit Union. A graduate of the Credit Union National Association (CUNA) Management School, Matthew has had the opportunity to experience SLFCU as both a member and an outsider looking in. “When I attended CUNA Management School, I chose to study SLFCU for a large three-year project. I got to know the Credit Union from the other side, not just as a member, and you could say I drank the Kool-Aid. SLFCU is a safe credit union with a strong outlook for the future,” he says.

Now, as Branch Manager, Matthew looks forward to creating a cohesive, positive work family with his team. “When everyone working at the branch has a family mentality, it builds a positive experience for both employees and members,” he says, “and I’m a people person. So, this role just fits my personality.” Outside of work, Matthew is an avid fisherman and enjoys traveling throughout New Mexico to his favorite fishing spots. He owns a not-for-profit fishing apparel company that works to provide opportunities for youth to learn the sport of fishing and the values it can teach, including victory, defeat, patience, and planning. ■

## Mary Martinez: Serving Seniors with Kindness and Care

### SLFCU Business Member Highlight



Mary’s career path was set when she was just a little girl. As she notes, senior citizens always sought her out. “As a kid, the neighbors were always looking for ‘little Mary’ when they needed a hand with something. I always kept an eye on my grandmothers and have been interested in senior wellness for just about my entire life,” she says.

That innate sense of caring morphed into a 30-year career in the senior care industry in New Mexico. Mary’s journey began after earning a degree in gerontology from New Mexico State University. In a ‘trial by fire’ moment, her first job as a case manager for Doña Ana County came with a caseload of 300 clients. “It was definitely a lot!” explains Mary. “I am grateful for that opportunity, though, as it taught me early on how to collaborate with other organizations to get things done.”

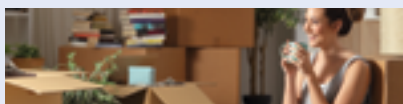
Two years later, she was recruited back to Albuquerque to work on the facility opening team of two assisted living facilities. It was then that Joe Sanders, then the head owner of Home Instead, approached her to join the management team of the local senior care company, which places caregivers in homes to assist seniors with daily activities. According to Mary, after just six months they asked her to buy the New Mexico franchise location. It took them a year to convince her. “I had a 3-month-old and a 6-year-old, so buying a business did not make much sense. So, of course I said yes!” laughs Mary.

One of Mary’s first moves after purchasing the business was to establish a business banking relationship with SLFCU. “I’ve had a personal account with SLFCU since the 1980s. I was actually one of SLFCU’s first business banking customers,” she notes. Why has she stayed with SLFCU after all these years? “I appreciate the security, and never worry about any of our accounts,” says Mary. “And I always appreciate the heads up on any changes. I know they are only a quick call away if I have any questions.”

Mary purchased her Home Instead franchise in 2002. And 19 exciting years later, the adventure continues, especially in the age of COVID-19. “The past 18 months have been challenging – particularly in finding caregivers – mostly because I’m picky.”

At Home Instead, Mary views what they do not as a job, but as a mission. With 114 employees and 85 active clients (and many on a waiting list), Mary’s collaboration skills have been put to great use. Says Mary, “One positive thing that has happened in our industry is that while we are competitors, we also have recognized we are stronger together.”

This community mindset has led to several professional acknowledgments, including a New Mexico Ethics in Business Award, and most recently, a New Mexico Humanitarian Award from the Albuquerque Jewish Community Center. “It’s been a wonderful career. They say that if you love what you do, you’ll never work a day in your life,” shares Mary. “Most days, I feel just that lucky.” ■



### Need to Update Your Address?

Ensure we can reach you with important account information. Visit any SLFCU branch or call 505.293.0500 to add or update your information.

## Five Questions for First-Time Car Buyers to Consider

The time has finally come: you're ready to buy your first vehicle. Whether you'd like to kick a hand-me-down clunker to the curb, or you're ready for a vehicle that better suits your current lifestyle, the following are five common questions first-time car buyers should consider before racing to an auto dealership.

### 1. Can I afford a new vehicle?

The best way to answer this question is by analyzing your budget. Review your expenses and determine what you can comfortably afford. In general, it is recommended you keep your car payment below 10% of your monthly take-home pay. Remember to create a plan with money left over for ongoing expenses such as gas, insurance, vehicle registration, etc. Considering these additional costs will allow you to enjoy your new vehicle without stressing over how you're going to pay for it.

### 2. What is my credit score?

Before applying for any loan, you should know and review your credit report. You can get your credit report, score, and history online from the three major credit reporting agencies (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion). Visit [annualcreditreport.com](http://annualcreditreport.com) to get started. Knowing your credit score before you head to the dealership can help you understand your negotiating power when discussing loan terms.

If your credit is less than great, you can improve your score by paying off any outstanding balances and reducing your debt. This will put you in a better position to receive a lower interest rate when applying for a loan.

### 3. How do I get an auto loan?

When it comes time to apply for a loan, you have options. You can finance your new vehicle with your credit union or a third-party lender offered by the dealership. With SLFCU, you can get pre-approved for an auto loan – giving you the advantage of knowing how much you can afford before you head to the dealership.

Showing the dealer your pre-approval letter also shows them you're a serious buyer and can have a positive impact on price negotiations.

### 4. Should I buy a new or used vehicle?

A new car can provide peace of mind with a factory warranty and knowing you're the first to own the vehicle. However, new cars are typically more expensive and depreciate quickly in the first few years of ownership.

Buying a used car can be a better option for first-time buyers on a budget. The previous owner covers the initial depreciation cost, which can leave you with potential savings of a few thousand dollars or more. Many times, you'll find you can buy a used car with more bells and whistles for less than you'd spend on a new vehicle. However, make sure you have the vehicle inspected and review the vehicle's history report. Overall, buying a new or used car ultimately depends on what you want and what you can afford.

### 5. How much of a down payment will I need?

You do not always have to put money down if you have a great credit score and history to support it. However, making a down payment can lower your monthly payments.

Placing at least 20% down on a new vehicle and about 10% on a used one could reduce your chances of becoming "upside-down" (owing more on your car than it's actually worth) and also lower your interest charges. If you're unable to put down 20%, you could pay to cover the tax, title, license, or any extra fees associated with your purchase.

Buying your first car may be the first major purchase you make. There's a lot to consider, but asking yourself these questions can help ease stress – and with some careful budgeting and planning, you'll be ready to hit the road without getting taken for a ride. ■

## Help Protect Yourself from Identity Theft

### Why Shredding Matters

Receipts, bills, and other paperwork often include personal information that can be used or sold by thieves. Shredding unnecessary documents is one way to help protect yourself from identity theft.

### When to Shred

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) offers an overview of how long you should store most types of documents.

Items like receipts you don't need, bills you've already paid, and credit card offers can be shredded right away. However, be careful to keep receipts related to business expenses, home renovations, or other paperwork that you may need for tax or recordkeeping purposes.

Records and items you should store for a longer period include tax documents, titles, deeds, and medical records. You may wish to keep financial statements for up to a year, but keep in mind financial institutions may make them available to you online. SLFCU members can access up to two years of account and statement history inside online banking.

Rachel Dimas, SLFCU's Risk Manager, says, "In the end, what to shred and what to keep is really a personal preference – you just need to practice smart storage of any records you keep."

Other items that should be kept include Social Security cards, birth certificates, marriage licenses, and death certificates. These types of documents should be stored in a secure location like a safe deposit box. According to Rachel, "If you choose to keep records in your home, they should be kept in a fireproof safe or fireproof filing cabinet, and should be secured at all times."

### How to Shred

If you have a shredder at home, you can shred most documents yourself. Rachel recommends a cross-cut shredder as opposed to a strip-cut shredder. "I have seen ample case evidence where strip-cut paper was easily obtained and recreated. I don't see this as a smart or safe option, even though these shredders are still available to consumers."

*Continued on page 4*

If you have a large amount of material to shred, you can search online for a shredding service near you. "Shredding services are a good way to go," says Rachel, "and consumers should seek a company that is NAID certified. Many of these businesses shred more than just paper, such as hard drives and other storage devices."

**Reduce Your Paper Footprint**

Avoid the issue of storing or shredding old documents by reducing the amount of paper you receive. Sign up for electronic statements and notices and request electronic receipts from stores that offer them. Stay

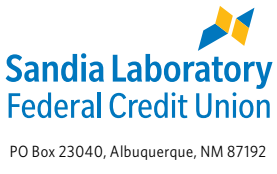
organized by creating folders for these items within your email inbox. To sign up for eStatements with SLFCU, log in to online banking and select the Documents widget.

**Shredding at SLFCU**

SLFCU hosts semi-annual shredding events where members may bring items to be shredded onsite by an NAID-certified shredding company. Appropriate shred items for these events include documents that contain personal information, with a limit of two Bankers Boxes (or similarly sized boxes) of shred material per member. Only paper can be shredded (no folders or media). ■

**Shred Your Documents for a Cause**

SLFCU's next shredding event is October 16 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at our Juan Tabo and Cottonwood branches. Please bring a monetary donation for SLFCU's fundraising efforts on behalf of New Mexico Credit Unions Connected Academy. Alternatively, a non-perishable food donation for the Rio Grande Food Project is also welcome. **Please arrive by 11:30 to be assured of service. Limit two boxes of paper per member. No folders, storage devices, or other media allowed. Plan to remain with your documents until they are shredded.**

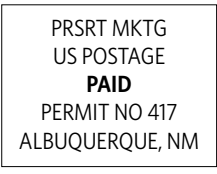


**Dollars & Sense**

*Maximize Your Holiday Shopping Dollars*

*Thank you for donating to the NM Credit Unions Connected Academy!*

*Meet Matthew Soto - SLFCU's New Cottonwood Branch Manager*



**On the Calendar**

**BALANCE Webinar: Using Credit Cards Wisely**

Tuesday, October 12 ▪ 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.  
Thursday, October 21 ▪ 6:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

**Indigenous Peoples Day**

Monday, October 11 ▪ All branches & Contact Center closed

**Shredding Event**

Saturday, October 16 ▪ 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.  
Juan Tabo and Cottonwood branches

**A New Auto Loan Shouldn't Have You Scrambled**

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- 3. cfnginia \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. ualsoebmit \_\_\_\_\_
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Apply for pre-approval: [slfcu.org/AutoLoans](http://slfcu.org/AutoLoans)

Solution: 1. flexible terms 2. down payment 3. financing 4. automobiles 5. auto loan

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