

Tuesday, August 19, 2008

Tali Aronsky/Elizabeth Miller (DCA): (212) 487-4283

DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS COMMISSIONER MINTZ ISSUES BACK-TO-SCHOOL SMART SHOPPING TIPS

City's New Online Financial Education Directory Offers Parents Free and Low Cost Money Management Refresher Course Opportunities

Back-to-school season is around the corner and the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) Commissioner Jonathan Mintz is providing smart shopping tips for parents and students before they spend their hard-earned money.

"Back-to-school shopping can be stressful, but there are many ways to do it right," said Consumer Affairs Commissioner Jonathan Mintz. "Keep these tips in mind, do a little bit of shopping homework and you can be ready to go. In fact, turn back-to-school shopping into a role-modeling opportunity."

The Commissioner issued the following pointers for parents to both help their finances and also model sound money management for their kids:

SMART MONEY LESSONS FOR YOUR KIDS

- **Create a budget and stick to it.** Budgeting is key. Help your children understand the difference between "needs" and "wants." Talk to them about how you stick to your budget and the tough choices you sometimes have to make to be responsible. Involve them in family spending decisions. If they earn an allowance or have a job, help them budget their money by creating a spending and savings plan.
- **Emphasize the importance of saving.** Even small amounts of money can grow into large amounts by saving a little each month. Teach your children why it's important to always keep money in savings for a "rainy day" and why they should put money into savings first before spending it. If your children do not have savings accounts, help them open one and bring them to the bank or credit union to make deposits.
- **Teach your children about credit.** Explain to your children that a credit card is not "free money" but money that must be paid back with interest. Be sure to explain why credit cards must be used responsibly.
- **Comparison shop to find good deals.** Involving your children in shopping or coupon cutting activities will help them appreciate the importance of reducing expenses whenever they can. Bring them to the grocery store and ask them to help you comparison shop for certain items to find the best deal. Make it fun! If your children are older, let them try to do the shopping while staying within a set budget.
- **Set a good example.** Children learn a great deal from watching their parents. Show your children how you make smart money decisions.

FINANCIAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

For many working families, back-to-school shopping can put a strain on the family budget. This year, it's never been easier for parents to get financial help. The City's new Financial Education Network Directory, launched earlier this year by DCA's Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE) is easily accessible and searchable online at www.nyc.gov/ofe. It lists free and low-cost financial education classes, workshops, hotlines and one-on-one counseling services available throughout the City. The Directory is searchable by borough and lists languages in which financial counseling is offered. Hard copies of the Directory are available by calling 311.

OTHER SMART BACK-TO-SCHOOL SHOPPING TIPS

- **Remember to ask for a receipt and save it.** In New York City, consumers are entitled to a receipt for purchases over \$20. Make sure the receipt does not include your personal information. By law, customer receipts must not display the expiration date or more than the last five digits of a debit or credit card.
- **Exercise caution with credit cards.** If you pay for back-to-school purchases with a credit card, read the fine print, know your credit limit and pay your balance in full. If you exceed your credit limit or pay late, some interest rates can skyrocket to 30 percent or higher.
- **Always check store refund policies.** Stores must post a sign detailing their policy. If they don't, you are entitled to a refund within 20 days of your purchase.
- **Be aware of restocking fees.** Many electronics stores charge a "restocking" fee for items returned in an opened box – especially electronics. The fee, which can vary, must be disclosed in the store's refund policy.

DCA participated in the Department of Education's 'Family Back-to-School Kickoff' in Central Park on Saturday, August 16, and Harlem Week on Sunday, August 17. DCA handed out back-to-school shopping tips to parents and schoolchildren who attended the events. [Download a copy of the tips online](#) or request a copy by calling 311.

DCA enforces the Consumer Protection Law and other related business laws throughout New York City. Ensuring a fair and vibrant marketplace for consumers and businesses alike, DCA licenses more than 60,000 businesses in 55 different categories. Through targeted outreach, partnerships with community and trade organizations, and informational materials, DCA educates consumers and businesses about their rights and responsibilities. For more information, call 311 or visit DCA online at www.nyc.gov/consumers.

OFE is the first municipal office of its kind in the nation with a mission to educate, empower and protect New Yorkers with low incomes, to help them make the best use of their financial resources to move forward economically. For more information, call 311 or visit DCA's OFE online at www.nyc.gov/ofe.