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NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

MILITARY FAMILY PLANNING OPTIONS

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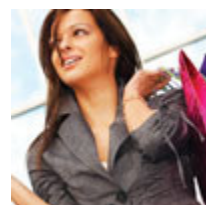
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### Affordable Gift Giving

*Don't break the bank!*

By Tom Holcom, President of the Military Banking Division, MidCountry Bank

The holidays ... when it comes to gift giving, military families face the same dilemma as most people: how to pay for it. Many times, when people need extra cash to make ends meet or to pay for unexpected expenses, they turn to payday lenders or high-interest credit cards. But with high fees, automatic rollovers and minimum payments, service members can quickly fall into an endless cycle of debt.

Obtaining gifts for everyone throughout the year, without going into debt can be tricky, but it can be done. The key is making the responsible choice now to be in a better financial position in the long run.

### Plan ahead

Create a list of everyone who you would like to give gifts to throughout the year, including the holidays, and then figure out a budget. Then, keep the list at all times throughout the year. The goal is to spread out the spending over time, instead of suddenly needing several hundred dollars all at once. It can also eliminate impulsive - and often costly - last minute decisions, and maintains preparedness for unexpected bargains.

### Make something

Have kids make something from the whole family. The gift of food almost always draws rave reviews. Or maybe building something with wood or metal is a viable idea. The goal here is creativity and cost-effectiveness, as well as a personal touch that makes the gift much more special.

### MILITARY SPOUSE NEED TO KNOW

#### What is an LES?

Even the world of military finance has acronyms. Understanding one in particular can be very beneficial to your family. LES means Leave and Earnings Statement.

### MILITARY SPOUSE GLOSSARY

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### Consider a group gift

If family members and others will be purchasing a gift for the same person, consider pooling money to buy a single gift. A small contribution from several people is transformed into a larger gift when leveraging buying power.

### Do something special

Offer to spend time with a recipient in a way that is meaningful. For a child, that might be helping build a snow fort after the first snow or spending the afternoon at the movies or in the park. For a grandparent, it might be helping with repairs around the house or planting flowers in the yard. A coupon for free "babysitting" is always a welcomed gift for parents that cannot otherwise get away. Again, creativity is the most important thing.

### Make a donation to charity

For those who seem to have everything, giving them one more "thing" won't mean much. But making any size donation to their favorite charity in their honor would be a wonderful blessing and a special way to honor them.

While these tips can be helpful, they won't mean much without financial discipline. So maintain the budget you set out with, avoid those last-minute decisions, and find creative solutions for sometimes-difficult problems. If you do, it'll make the celebrations that much more sweet.

For more financial education, visit [pioneerservices.com](http://pioneerservices.com). For loan information, visit [pioneermilitarylending.com](http://pioneermilitarylending.com).

### About the author

*Tom Holcom is the president of the Military Banking Division of MidCountry Bank. He serves on numerous boards, including Business Executives for National Security and as president of the Command General Staff College Foundation. He has been named "Entrepreneur of the Year for Social Responsibility" in the Central Midwest region by Ernst & Young and has also accepted the Secretary of Defense "Employer Support Freedom Award" for his company's support of employees serving in the National Guard and Reserve.*

