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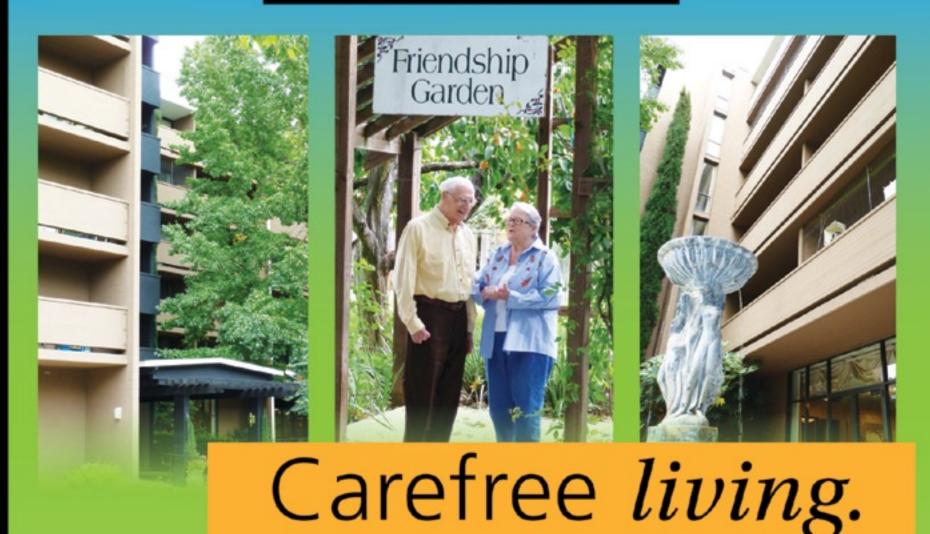
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Organize coupons for maximum grocery savings

By SUSAN LAIRD

Editor, Valley Community Newspapers susan@valcomnews.com

You hear about them on the evening news every so often: Coupon Queens. Those amazing people who somehow manage to get \$200 worth of groceries for two bucks.

Truth is, those folks manage to accomplish this feat only once a year on average...and they plan for their major shopping day well in advance.

However, that shouldn't discourage the rest of us from putting in a little activity to shave some money off our weekly grocery bill. In fact – with a little organization – you will be able to achieve similar savings over a year.

Experienced couponers have routines that save them money. Here is one possible routine that can save the average family hundreds of dollars.

Plan Smart

Buy the local Sunday and Wednesday papers every week. Also look for special inserts in community papers, such as *The Valley Shopper*. These publications will contain coupons, sales and savings tips. They are well worth any cost, since you will recoup your savings quickly.

Clip and sort the coupons. Categories for sorting can include: Baby, Beauty, Bread and Rolls, Beverages, Breakfast, Canned Goods, Cleaning Supplies, Condiments, Dairy, Fruit, Laundry, Meat, Medicine, Pets, Shampoo, Snacks, Toiletries, Vegetables and more.

You can also make a category for "Services," such as auto repair, dry cleaning, pet grooming, pizza and more.

Put the coupons into a recipe card file. You can mark index card dividers with each category name for easy reference.

Do this every week and you will soon have quite a resource to turn to. You can also print out online coupons and put them in your coupon file organizer.

Check the weekly shopping news that comes in the Wednesday papers. Look at the "loss leaders" – those items that grocery stores heavily discount every few weeks.

Plan your weekly menu around as many "loss leader" items that you can. For example, last month, corned beef and cabbage was on sale for St. Patrick's Day. In the spring, hams and lamb go on sale.

Shop Smart

Make a shopping list – and stick to it. Don't buy anything that isn't on your list, unless it is a significant "loss leader" that you know you will actually use soon.

As you fill your cart, pull out the appropriate coupons and put them in the front of your coupon file. That way, when you are done shopping, you can easily hand them to the cashier.

Keep an eye on the register as your items are scanned – sometimes stores fail to update the computers with the new sale prices. Keep and check your receipt. If you notice any discrepancies, go to the store manager and politely point out the error. Ask for a refund. Managers are happy to help – and they are grateful to be informed when the machines are off target. Make friends with the store managers and they will go out of their way to be helpful. Some may even give you a "heads up" on future sales when they learn that you are a "Couponer."

Remember to use your coupons for local services, too!



Photo iStockphoto

SAVE MONEY by organizing coupons for maximum savings at local grocery stores and businesses

Track Smart

When you get home, put your items in the pantry. Keep a little notebook or computer spreadsheet to record your grocery spending – and how much you saved on that trip. Most receipts have a "You Saved" line at the bottom.

After 12 months, tally both lines. You should see a significant savings in the "You Saved" column. When you consider the additional savings you received at the register by purchasing "Loss Leaders" and special deals, you will realize that you have saved hundreds of dollars – just like those Coupon Queens of lore.









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