

# CCE-Steuben financial education helps elderly widow save her house

By Nancy Reigelsperger, *CCE-Steuben Financial Educator*

The Financial Management program through Cornell Cooperative Extension provides financial coaching to people of all income levels, ages and needs. We receive client referrals from a multitude of programs across the county. One referral from the Office of the Aging was a woman in desperate need of financial help. She was in her early 80's, extremely upset, and on the verge of tears. As we talked, I discovered she had recently lost her husband, who had no life insurance nor a pension, leaving her in dire financial straits. The biggest issue was that she was behind in her property taxes and about to lose her home of 50 years. On top of this challenge, she had run up \$20,000 in credit card debt and used all of her savings to pay for her husband's funeral.

We worked together on a strategy to contact her creditors and create a budget so that going forward she could pay her taxes and keep her home. I encouraged her to apply for food stamps and utilize the food pantry, because previously she had been skipping groceries so she could attempt to pay her bills. She admitted to me that she was at the end of her line when she came to our office, feeling devastated about the possibility of losing her home. She didn't know where to turn because she was an independent woman and didn't want to rely on her family and was embarrassed to ask for help. She didn't want to discuss her situation with family or friends, so having someone unbiased and professional like CCE to discuss her situation was truly comforting.

In a recent follow up call, I spoke to this woman and she admitted she was living a different life now and no longer felt depressed. She is able and ready to pay this year's school taxes, and once they are paid, can make arrangements for payments on back taxes. She has arranged payments on an old gas bill and is now receiving HEAP assistance. She thanked me profusely for being so helpful to her and her words to me were "I now can bask in the sunshine." There are so many unique financial situations that weigh heavily on people's lives and our goal is to help them strategize wise choices, to be able to look at their financial situations with a different set of eyes, and to find their path to a financially successful life.

**CCE  
HELPED  
ME...**

*"...budget for  
both food and  
bills."*

*80-year-old widow*