

State Fire Marshal Urges Caution in the Kitchen this Thanksgiving

Three times as many cooking fires occur on Thanksgiving than on an average day

Insurance Commissioner and State Fire Marshal Wayne Goodwin is reminding North Carolinians to be especially aware of kitchen and cooking safety on Thanksgiving, when it is easy to be distracted by activity and people in the home. According to the National Fire Protection Association, home cooking fires peak on major U.S. holidays that traditionally include cooking, with Thanksgiving being the leading day for reported cooking fires.

"Entertaining family, sitting down to a big meal and otherwise readying for the busy holiday season can take our attention away from safety," said Goodwin. "I want all North Carolinians to keep safety at the forefront of their minds, and to particularly keep an eye on the kitchen."

Goodwin recommends the following safety tips for cooking on Thanksgiving:

- Always stay in the kitchen while frying, grilling or broiling food. If you have to leave the kitchen for even a short period of time, turn off the stove.
- Keep things that can catch fire such as oven mitts, wooden utensils, food packaging, towels and curtains away from the cooking area.
- Establish a "kid-free zone" of at least 3 feet around the stove and areas where hot food or drink is being prepared or carried.
- Be alert when cooking. If you are sleepy or have consumed alcohol, don't cook.
- If you have a stove fire, when in doubt, just get out! Call 9-1-1 from outside the home.

To ensure a safer Thanksgiving Day, members of the public are encouraged to watch and share NFPA's "Thanksgiving Fire Safety Tips" video at bit.ly/NFPACooking.

Home From The Hunt Campaign Message for the Holidays: Be Safe

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission's Home From The Hunt™ campaign reminds everyone who is hunting during the holiday season to make safety the top priority.

"Thanksgiving and Christmas are traditional times for family and friends to go hunting," said Travis Casper, the state hunter education coordinator with the Wildlife Commission. "In the excitement of a holiday hunt, don't overlook the safety aspects. Make it a part of your planning. Stress the importance of everyone being careful."

Before the hunt, Casper advised:

- Get back to basics - review hunter education training and equipment instructions.
- Know the rules - read applicable requirements, licensing and season information in the Regulations Digest before going afield.
- Inspect all equipment - repair or replace equipment, especially tree stands, before use.

"We recommend a full-body safety harness anytime you use a tree stand," Casper said. "Maintain three points of contact when climbing with a firearm, and never carry anything as you climb."

- Always keep the muzzle pointed in a safe direction.
- Be certain of your target and what is beyond.
- Keep your finger off the trigger until ready to shoot.

A blaze orange cap, hat or outer garment that is visible from all sides must be worn when hunting bear, feral hogs, deer, rabbit, squirrel, grouse, pheasant or quail with a firearm. Anyone hunting deer during a deer firearms season, regardless of method, must wear blaze orange. Hunters also are required to wear blaze orange while hunting with archery equipment during the black powder and gun seasons, including Sundays.

For more information on the Home From The Hunt™ campaign, Hunting Heritage Apprentice Permits and the Hunter Education Program, go to www.ncwildlife.org or call 919-707-0031.

Since 1947, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission has been dedicated to the conservation and sustainability of the state's fish and wildlife resources through research, scientific management, wise use, and public input. The Commission is the state regulatory agency responsible for the enforcement of fishing, hunting, trapping and boating laws and provides programs and opportunities for wildlife-related educational, recreational and sporting activities. To learn more, visit www.ncwildlife.org.

Arts and Crafts Workshop Every Tuesday

The Arts Council invited you to join them each Tuesday at the Arts Council office for art and fellowship. Local amateur artists, whether it is crocheting, painting, sewing, drawing or other, get together every Tuesday from 1 to 4 p.m. to share ideas and get tips. Come join in the fun.

There is no registration and no cost, but bring your own supplies.

Also starting April 1st, Clinton Harward will be giving drawing lessons. These are also free, but please bring supplies.

Contact the Anson County Arts Council for additional information at 704-694-4950.

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You Decide: What's Happening to the Middle Class?

By Dr. Mike Walden, North Carolina Cooperative Extension: During the campaigns leading up to the recent elections, we heard a lot about the middle class. Many – if not most – candidates tailored their messages and promises to helping those in the middle class improve their lives. Why was this? One answer comes from political science and is termed the "median voter strategy." This strategy simply says that in an election – especially a general election rather than a primary – candidates should craft their messages to appeal to the average – or median – voter. If most people don't like "extreme" positions – too far at one of the political spectrum or the other – then the notion is a "down the middle" message will appeal to the largest number of voters.

A second answer is an off-shoot of the first, but may be more direct. In modern America, the middle class has been where the votes are. Traditionally, the majority of Americans were middle-class by statistical measures. Hence, a candidate who concentrates on middle-class issues and concerns will be going where the votes are.

The third answer is less politically oriented and more economically focused. It is that there are very real existences of the middle class – a large and viable entity. Therefore, politicians are giving so much attention to the middle class because it is in trouble.

In this column I will examine this third possibility. The first step is defining "middle class." Obviously the term implies households in the "middle," especially of the income distribution. But how broad is the term, and where does it begin and end? There are many answers and measures. Here, I will define "middle class" as households earning between \$35,000 and \$75,000, which puts a spread around the average (median) household income of approximately \$50,000.

Using this definition we can quickly see one issue: the middle class has been getting smaller. In North Carolina between 2007 and 2012, the percentage of households defined as middle-class (by the above definition) declined from more than one-third of all households to just above 30 percent.

The earnings of middle-class households have also been dropping in the last five years. After adjusting for inflation, middle-class households experienced a 7 percent fall in income. This was a decline twice as much as for those at the top of the income ladder, but it was smaller than the loss for those at the income ladder's bottom rung.

Middle-class households are also stressed by some of the spending challenges they face. Many middle-class parents naturally want their children to attend and graduate from college, because they know a college degree is one of the best tickets to a good standard of living. But it's been well documented that college costs and college debt have both been rising rapidly (although it should be recognized that North Carolina's public universities have some of the most affordable tuitions in the nation). Also, there is uncertainty about where health insurance premiums are headed.

Middle-class households face changes in the workplace, as well. Traditionally, factories were among the largest employers of middle-class workers. But for several decades, factory jobs have been replaced by machines and technology. Other middle-income positions – in sales, finance and even management – may be on the chopping block in the future. Economists actually have a term for the replacement of labor by machines and gadgets: "technological unemployment." It likely will continue.

Plus, there's maybe even a bigger reason to worry about the stability of the middle class. Historians tell us authoritarian rule was replaced by democracies when the middle class developed and expanded in countries. So if the middle class shrinks – leaving an upper class and lower class but not much in-between – there may be reason to worry about our political system.

So what's the answer to strengthening the middle class? Many think the ultimate answer is education – making sure individuals have opportunities for training for middle-income jobs and opportunities to be retrained and re-educated for different jobs when necessary.

The middle class is at the heart of most successful modern economies and political systems. Saving, protecting and even expanding the middle class may be the issue of the century. You decide!

Real or Rip-Off? Top 10 Most Common Counterfeit Gifts

In today's brand-crazed culture, labels matter. Whether it's a Coach purse, a Rolex watch or an Apple iPad, certain brands are status symbols. Brand obsession fuels the market for knock-offs of products ranging from purses to perfume, from computer games to computer tablets.

The Better Business Bureau lists the top 10 most common counterfeit gifts: 1) Purses, shoes and leather goods, 2) Smartphones, computer tablets and other electronics, 3) DVDs and CDs, 4) Software and computer games, 5) Sports memorabilia and apparel, 6) Watches and jewelry, 7) Sunglasses, 8) Perfume, 9) Blue jeans and 10) Sporting event and concert tickets.

If you are searching for deals, BBB has advice for how to avoid buying fake products.

- Shop in established stores and on reputable websites.
- Beware of great deals that seem too good to be true.
- Buy directly from the brand's store or website.
- Be careful buying brand-name merchandise and big-ticket items from online marketplaces like eBay and Craigslist where you cannot inspect the products before you buy them.
- Ask for a certificate of authenticity on autographed memorabilia.
- Have an independent appraisal done to verify the value or jewelry or artwork.
- Buy sports merchandise that is officially licensed by the NFL, NBA or other sports organizations.

"If you find out that the merchandise you bought or received is counterfeit, you are probably stuck with it," said BBB President Tom Bartholomy. "It's hard to return pirated software or fake tickets."

For more information, please visit bbb.org or call BBB at 1-877-317-7236 toll-free in N.C. and S.C.

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Uptown Wadesboro, Inc. Presents the

Christmas Tour of Homes

Sunday, December 7 12 noon to 7 p.m.

Uptown Wadesboro, Inc. proudly presents its Christmastime Tour of Homes ... Sunday, December 7. Tour local homes and businesses beautifully decorated for Christmas with your friends and family.

There will be a Free Concert for the community at First United Methodist Church by the Anson Singers at 3 p.m. The group is directed by Emily Litaker Privette.

There are three homes and three local businesses on the Tour. You may take the tour before the Anson Singers concert or after. Tickets are available the day of the Tour at the first stop, the James Holbrook Building, which is located beside BB&T on North Greene Street.

\$10 Advance Tickets at Lucy's, Wadesboro Town Hall, Southern Medley Wine Cellar & Buff Monkey