

# Put on a happy face

The depressed economy is, well, depressing. Here's how to stay positive during tough times

By Katie Foutz  
kfoutz@scn1.com

Summer 2008 is the summer of high gas prices, high grocery bills, stagnant income and low morale.

How do you stay positive in such bleak economic times? The Sun asked a variety of Naperville happiness experts the same question. Take this guide as your midsummer mental-health checkup.

## Ellen Lerner, life coach

**1. Do a reality check.** "What's really the truth about your finances? What's really the situation? If you've maxed out your credit cards, don't avoid it; find out how much you owe, what's in your bank account and do a realistic assessment of what's going on ... so you're not living in that fairy tale land, that make-believe land."

**2. Manage your fear.** "A lot of people will go to scarcity mode, and they won't spend money on anything and will just lock the bank account. Then the fear can get bigger and bigger and bigger, and that just causes more stress. It helps when you have done that reality check."

**3. Have some fun.** "Still having a good time, still going out to the movies, still doing a little shopping. Balance fun with realistic, careful spending. Go out and have some fun anyway. Just keep everything in balance and in check. I'm an entrepreneur, so if I'm spending money that encourages growth in my business, always keeping in mind what my fi-

## Consult the experts

■ **Susan Behnke**, co-owner of Universal Spirit Yoga in Naperville: 630-416-7526 or [www.universalspiritryoga.com](http://www.universalspiritryoga.com).

■ **Ellen Lerner**, professional life coach at Dramatic Solutions in Naperville: 630-778-0597 or [www.mydramaticsolutions.net](http://www.mydramaticsolutions.net).

■ **Donna Lettieri-Marks**, Psy.D., licensed clinical psychologist in private practice in Naperville: 630-904-6610 or [www.findcounseling.com/marks.html](http://www.findcounseling.com/marks.html).

ancial situation is, I'm not running to that fear place."

## Donna Lettieri-Marks, psychologist

**1. Avoid negative influences.** "Anxiety is contagious - we know that - so it's important not to participate in doom-and-gloom conversations with family and friends. ... We can't let that set the tone for our emotional state. Also, don't let negative media get to you. There are other pieces of information out there: problem-solving approaches, economic indicators looking at things as moving in a more positive direction. It's important to take a full view of everything."

**2. Plan ahead, but live in the present.** "Anxiety and fear catapults us into the future. We can think the worst and catastrophize, and our thoughts can really change if we get really ahead of ourselves. ... I'm not saying you

don't want to look ahead and make a realistic action plan, but once you do that, stay in the present and work on what's happening in the now.

"(It's important) for people to detach or redirect themselves away from worries. Worries are the 'could's' and 'should's' of the future and don't serve any purpose other than focusing away needed energy from the here and now. All of these things are much easier said than done. People have to work on their awareness of where their thoughts and emotions are going. Then they can put themselves in the driver's seat to really cope with their problems."

**3. Be thankful.** "If we set our goals and we met our mortgage this month or we got food on the table, that's something. It's OK to really pull it in and really reinforce ourselves about what we might take for granted. Eventually the landscape tends to change."

## Susan Behnke, co-owner, Universal Spirit Yoga

**1. Find a sacred place.** "We understand we all have to pay bills and we all have to pay rent just like everyone else, but because (our students) come to a place like a yoga studio, we encourage greater physical and spiritual health, and we honor and share knowledge with them. We have wonderful certified teachers from different lineages, and they're really interested in students' needs and well-being."