

'The American Dream'

Are we finding goals of a lifetime too costly to fulfill?

By SHIELA MCCARTHY DUNNELLS

The economy is in a fragile state. Massive layoffs have idled 185,000 auto workers. Corporate personnel are feeling the effect, and the fever for gold continues.

Closer to home, the average family is also trying to cope with its fragile economy, whether it's budgeting for a \$189 price tag on a lowly ground chuck, \$25 for a pair of sneakers, or a \$2,500 personal property tax.

Rich man, poor man and all those in between are asking when the economy will steady itself. Not soon, acknowledge economists, who say that polls indicate that the average American has begun to accept double digit inflation as a way of life.

Two area couples discussed the dilemma of rising prices and their personal priorities when dividing the paycheck. Have they gone underground, given up private school-

ing for their children, canceled vacations and entertaining, dispensed with the better things in life? Not quite.

LARRY AND BETH, not their real names, live in an elegant home. Larry is employed by a local advertising firm in a creative and lucrative capacity. The couple have two children and, as Beth expressed wistfully, "At one time we had big dreams."

"The hardest part about inflation is giving up your dreams," she said. "You suddenly find you have stopped climbing."

The country club, the summer home, boat or private education for the children that were once in the future are no longer even discussed, she admitted candidly.

With a sigh she continued, "We feel if we can simply maintain the status quo we are doing well."

Entertainment for this family is going out to dinner. "However, we usually go to a place called the Ground

Round," said Larry.

"The kids are welcome, they can throw peanut shells on the floor and we can get in and out for about \$12 for supper, liquor not included."

Although both enjoy the Fisher Theater, the Birmingham Theater, and the movies that type of an evening has become rare.

"What we usually do," Larry said, "is go to the \$1.50 matinee. If the film is poor it doesn't hurt so much."

Entertaining at home has taken the place of the expensive evening out, according to Beth. "What we do is much more of the 'come for dessert' type invitation."

"I have also noticed," she said wryly, "that the menus of the last three dinner parties I have attended have ranged from spaghetti to lasagna."

Obviously, she added, "we are not alone in backing away from the 'steak-on-the-grill' type of party."

While the frequency and style of entertaining at home have changed, the

couple said their love for Birmingham hasn't.

"We would give up a whole lot," he said, "before we would consider changing our lifestyle, that is, where we live."

With a large home, high taxes and two children, how does this family plan for the future?

"What bothers me about saving for the future," pondered Larry, "is that it is no longer considered virtuous to save. A person almost feels stupid saving for something specific that you know will cost twice as much in six months."

In the past, parents prepared for the eventuality of paying for college tuition if they saved for nothing else, he explained.

"We aren't going to remortgage the house for our boys' educations. We'll help them, but it will require a more serious effort on their part."

Limiting entertainment, vacations and giving up the American virtue of

"saving for a rainy day" are not the only changes in Larry and Beth's lives.

"I think it is only fair to say that I have always been a cheapskate," said an unabashed Larry. "I hate to pay full price for anything and rarely do. So, with inflation, we have nowhere to go in terms of cutting out."

Still, there are ways the couple trim expenditures. "I can remember when we would have replaced one of our cars within three years," Larry explained. "Now my attitude is 'ride it to the ground.'"

The couple said they are pessimistic about the future of the economy. "This is the 'me' generation," Larry said. "Nobody wants to sacrifice in order to turn things around."

"And that includes me," he added with a wink.

BILL AND CONNIE live in a beautiful, modern home that nestles into the back of a large piece of property. From the living room they can see a stream. During the summer months raccoons come up on the lawn to feed.

All that rustic beauty carries a hefty price tag in terms of taxes and upkeep, Bill said. When asked if he would move if the cost of living became too high Bill responded honestly.

"Yes. That's reality. We'll sacrifice but only to a point. I don't drive an economy car because I like it."

Bill is employed by a "blue chip" company. The couple have one child, a teenage daughter, because, Bill said, "Frankly, this is what we feel we can comfortably afford."

Neither Bill nor Connie, who say they are careful and conservative shoppers, is very complimentary about the quality of the products they purchase. "They cost twice as much for half the quality."

For example, Bill noted, "Automobiles are out of proportion with the ability of anyone to pay for them. In order to attack the cost, the company weakens their quality."

Bill contends that American products are well-engineered, but "the execution is poor and the worker falls short."

Take the boat industry, he continued. "They put a boat on a boat and cut the quality until they can build it at that price."

Bill and Connie say that they live conservatively. With the exception of their say their tastes are not extravagant. Saving for the future has never been a problem, he explained.

"I work for a company with a socialistic attitude," he said. With stock options and the cost of exercising those options taken from his paycheck he said "The company has done my saving for me."

"If I left the company," mused Bill, "I'd have to rethink the whole process."

For Connie beating inflation is a day-by-day struggle. She cuts costs, she said, by buying in bulk. "Another trick I have found is to serve a Chinese menu once a week. I find that one-half pound of meat used in a Chinese recipe will stretch to feed three people."

Bill reduced the price of heating the home by installing a wood burning stove. "Living where I do I can cut my own wood."

The couple feel that many problems would be solved by "electing the Republicans," Bill said flatly. "It is time people realized that there is no more 'free lunch' in this country. We can't spend money we don't have."

Pessimistically, he said, the future will be more of the same inflationary prices.

Take a look at your front plantings

As we face forward toward spring you may be interested in incorporating grapes among your innovations.

A barrier fence with grape vines can be a plus control for traffic and even to have a letter L formed at the corner of your property to designate the property line. You have to remember that grapes like full sun for best results.

These grapes can be trained on a split rail fence or there can be fence posts with wire for growth guides. Here's another idea, if you have a very sunny patio. Plan on a trellis and at each end plant grape vines for food as well as shade.

Oakland County horticultural agent Greg Patchan has planned a grape pruning demonstration for 10 a.m. Saturday, at the home of master grape grower Karl Bailey, 5275 N. Adams, Bloomfield Hills.

Bailey grows grapes for wine and table use. His invitation says to wear boots and dress warm. In the meantime, you might like to send for the catalog of Kelly Brothers, Danville, N.Y. 14437. They are right in the center of wine country, have a fine reputation and couldn't help but have good grape stock.

THIS IS a good time to begin to be aware of the appearance of the front plantings of your own property. Basically, you want the front of your house to have a pleasing appearance. How



down to earth
**Alice Wessels
Burlingame**

does it look in winter? Do you have enough evergreens to carry the landscape picture? Maybe you have a front architectural detail you wish you could hide. An old faithful for this role is a spruce but you must have a half day of sun for best results. Maybe you have had to chop down some elms. It is not too early to concentrate on the needs of the front of your property. Make a list of priorities now. Don't overlook the early spring glamour of having an elegant flowering tree.

That tree selection could be a saucer magnolia, forsythia, flowering crab, or mountain ash. A pleasing home appearance gratifies the occupants and helps sell the home.

AT THE MATTHAEI Botanical Gardens at the University of Michigan they are having a glorious gathering of the clan, "Dining with Caesars and Kings."

Dr. Lorna Sass will be present to deliver a dynamic lecture program: "Dining in Imperial Rome," at 8 p.m. Friday, April 11. At 1:30 p.m. Saturday,

there will be a lecture, "A Gastronomic Tour of Richard II's Kitchen and Great Hall." There is an admission charge. This treat sounds like the ultimate for those who grow herbs and use them for

cooking. Refreshments in the style of the period will be served after each lecture.

Recently I attended the banquet of the day lily and iris growers. This was iris night with slides of the best given by the national vice president of the Iris Society, Hal Stahly of Grand Blanc. The one I admired most was "Money."

It was a beautiful large gold specimen, with large ruffles on its fall which made it a winner. Of course, the name helped. Al Goldner, a local grower, has a large collection of national winners and has developed noteworthy crosses.

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