

## What Your Credit Says About You – and What You Can Do About It

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Despite what some people might think, “credit” is not a dirty word. In fact, in today’s world it is almost impossible to conduct any financial transactions without credit. Understanding what credit actually means to your personal finances is critical. While having credit does not mean you must incur debt or pay interest, it does mean you have the responsibility and opportunity to build a good financial reputation.

According to financial monitoring service Experian, credit is the ability to borrow money or access goods or services with the understanding that you’ll pay later. To the extent that creditors consider you worthy of their trust, you are said to be creditworthy, or to have “good credit.”

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) explains that a credit report is the statement containing information compiled by credit reporting agencies about your credit activity and current credit situation, such as your loan-paying history and the status of your credit accounts.

The most familiar credit reporting agencies are Experian, Equifax and Transunion. Creditors are not required to report every credit you have to a credit reporting company so each report might be slightly different.

Information contained in your credit reports (most people have more than one) include: (1) **Personal Information**, including your name(s), current/previous addresses/telephone number(s)/DOB and SSN; (2) **Credit Accounts**, including past credit accounts, creditor



name(s), open and closed dates, credit limit/balances and payment history; (3) **Collections**; (4) **Public Records**, including foreclosures, bankruptcies, liens, civil suits and judgments; and (5) **Inquiries**. Many might not understand the differences between types of inquiries. A “soft inquiry,” generated when a creditor preapproves you for an offer or you have authorized a credit check, such as a potential employer authorization, does NOT affect your credit score. A “hard inquiry” happens when you apply for credit or a loan. This inquiry DOES drop your credit score for a short period. There is only one source from which you can safely get a free credit report: [www.annualcreditreport.com/index.action](http://www.annualcreditreport.com/index.action). This red, white and blue site is authorized by Federal law.

### Credit Report vs. Credit Score

Your credit report is a document of your practices in paying debt. Your credit score is a three-digit number, determined using a credit report, that calculates the likelihood you will succeed or fail in repaying a debt.

Five ratios are used to determine a credit score:

## You Are Not Alone: Understanding the Stages of Recovery from Combat

By David Burden

In a 2007 article titled [“Home From War”](#), Patience Mason explains in great detail the five stages of recovery many service members might experience when returning from a combat theater. Mason’s work is based on her own experiences as a spouse whose husband returned from Vietnam between 1965-66. The couple struggled to save their marriage for 15 years until her husband was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and they were able to educate themselves and develop solutions.

Mason documents five stages of recovery commonly experienced by combat veterans:

**Stage 1: I’m fine.** It is not uncommon for those who have experienced combat traumas to try to shake it off and get on with life. To some degree, especially with World War II and Korean War veterans, the mindset was, “What I went through was a sense of duty, and save that for the next guy.” Although many Vietnam and current combat veterans might share a similar mindset, the difference is that their combat experiences often were more intense with fewer deaths, due to medical improvements, but

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# Director's Corner



## Veteran Service Leaders and Partners,

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) seeks to raise awareness of a particular type of financial exploitation that primarily targets the elderly Veteran population: pension poaching.

**Pension Poaching** is a term used when an unethical advisor (financial planner, attorney, or even a caregiver) profits by making financial maneuvers (such as hiding assets) in advance of the completion of an application for pension benefits, especially the aid and attendance benefit, to artificially qualify the claimant.

As you are aware, VA's pension program exists to support our most vulnerable war-time Veterans and their families. For pensioners who need a higher level of care, additional monetary payments are available for those who are housebound or require the aid and attendance of another person to assist them with the activities of daily living.

Financial exploitation happens when assets are hidden in trusts or annuity products to qualify the applicant when they otherwise would not qualify. Since VA has a three-year look-back period, if the Veteran gets caught falsely qualifying, they could be penalized. If payments were made, they will have to repay the money. However, if they paid fees for assistance to move their assets, they likely will not be able to recover that money from the pension poacher.

With your assistance, VA wants to inform Veterans and their families to be wary of organizations or individuals that contact them out of the blue to assist with a VA claim. Veterans and family members should be aware that requests for payments of money up front for assistance with filing a VA claim may be a sign of a scam, and that no one can guarantee "an enhanced VA pension."

Thank you for your continued support of VA and our joint partnerships.

*Larry D. Moore*

Executive Director



## Services for Vets

We provide financial assistance\* for basic living needs to eligible Veterans and their dependents.

- Mortgage payments
- Rent
- Utilities
- Food
- Children's school clothing
- Adult work clothing
- Dentures, glasses and hearing aids

### Free to Veterans!

- Regularly scheduled transportation for medical appointments at VA medical facilities and Ohio Veterans Home

\* Other types of financial assistance maybe considered on a case by case basis. All types of assistance are subject to change based on need and funding.

### Veterans Affairs Assistance

- Assistance applying for Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits
- Preparation of VA forms and paperwork
- Supportive documentation of claims and pertinent data
- Proper submission of claims to the VA
- Service connected compensation
- Non-service pension
- Widows pension
- Burial benefits
- Headstones

If you are a Veteran in financial need or need help with your VA claim, please visit us at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd., Akron, OH, or call

**(330) 643-2830.**



# Tip of the **H.A.T.** • Helping America's Troops

## Free Guitar Lessons Hosted by the VSC

To some, playing the guitar might be nothing more than a fun way to entertain family or pass the time. To others, it can be so much more.

"I've been playing guitar since I was 15 years old," says Frank McFadden. "Especially in time of high stress, having a guitar at your side can be an incredible comfort. I've seen how it can be your 'buddy' to help get you through some very rough times."

McFadden, 71, in collaboration with the VSC, now offers the "Guitar Lesson for Vets" program, an ongoing series of gatherings to develop a community of novice, intermediate and skilled guitarists. More than just a series of rudimentary music lessons, McFadden and his volunteer team cover music theory, accessory selection (including strings, slides and picks), guitar construction and performance skills.

"Our goal is to team guitarists with varying playing abilities," he says. "This includes total beginners, 'noodlers' (people who can play a little bit) and experienced musicians who have performed in bands. We ask that you give us a six-month commitment – by doing so, you will then have enough knowledge to build on for the rest of your life."

McFadden says the six-month commitment is key. "At the beginning, learning to play a guitar can be difficult. But sticking with it that long will not only help your fingers develop but it will also help you develop a relationship with others."

His interest in this program grew from watching returning veterans lose touch with their networks of friends. "I wanted to do something to continue the camaraderie service personnel have with their peers, and I recognized how playing in a band can have the same feeling. It's all about the buddy system."

McFadden credits his experience playing in bands with his brothers and other friends as key to his development as a person. "I have some great friends, and music and the service have been a key part in those relationships."

He encourages performing musicians to participate in the program, which is held at the VSC offices at 1060 E. Waterloo Rd. in Akron every Thursday from 16:00 to 18:00. "Performing musicians are key to this program, offering instruction and peer-to-peer interaction. It can help you further your own playing goals," he says.

McFadden encourages participants to bring their own acoustic guitars, though he says he is working

with Sam Ash Music to develop further resources. Donations of American-made acoustic guitars will be accepted.

"Just as with the classic Woodstock Music Festival poster created by Arnold Skolnic, we hope to instill in all participants a sense of peace, love and music," he says.

For more information, contact Frank McFadden at 330-929-3570. ★

First meeting July 22 4:00-6:00

**Free Guitar Lessons  
For All Veterans  
All Levels of Skill  
From Beginners to  
Masters**

**Veterans Services  
Commission  
1060 East Waterloo Road  
Akron, Ohio**

**Lessons  
for  
Vets**

Frank McFadden  
330-929-3570



# Your Health

*'You Are Not Alone,' from page 1*

higher casualties and more severe injuries.

**Stage 2: I'm not fine, but I'm not telling you.** The service member's self-awareness of increasing anger issues and outbursts towards family members, or reoccurring thoughts of traumatic events, can lead to numbness, avoidance, or isolation from others. In addition, the service member intentionally or unintentionally creates breaches of trust with those close to him or her.

**Stage 3: I can't talk to people who weren't there.** Unfortunately, this attitude bears some truth and service members might use this mindset to create self-qualifying barriers for friends and family. In the service member's mind, "How can anyone know what I am going through if they haven't walked in my shoes?"

**Stage 4: What is wrong with me?** Mason explains, "The term PTSD is a good description of the effects of war on normal people. The skills of war create a lot of disorder in your life." However, she counters this premise in the sense that war is the problem and symptoms of PTSD are a

survival mechanism to our "fight or flight" response.

**Stage 5: I'm screwed up and no one can help.** Mason makes two important points here: 1.) It is human to believe no one can help you, but this belief is untrue. There are many people and a wealth of information to help veterans deal with PTSD, but the process begins with telling someone you are having problems; 2.) You are not alone, and the effects of PTSD are not unique to you. This syndrome has affected people throughout history.

The Summit County Veterans Service Commission is ready to help. We can connect you with a VA mental health specialist or the VetCenter located within the VSC facility. Contact us at 330-643-2830, or visit us at 1060 E. Waterloo Road. Akron, Ohio, or at [www.vscsummitoh.us](http://www.vscsummitoh.us). ★



*'What Your Credit Says,' from page 1*

- 1. Payment History (35%)** – How timely are you in paying creditors;
- 2. Utilization (30%)** – How much credit you are using; for example, if you have a credit card with a credit limit of \$1,000 and your balance is \$900, you are using 90% of available credit. Using more than 30% of available credit will negatively affect your credit score;
- 3. Credit History Length (15%)** – This includes the age of your oldest credit account, age of your newest credit account, and the average. If you close your oldest credit, this will drop your credit score for a short period of time;
- 4. Credit Types (10%)** – Having diverse credit – mortgage, car, credit card, etc. – will assist your credit score; and
- 5. New Credit (10%)** – Accounts you recently opened. Too many inquiries for credit can increase your credit risk and negatively impact your credit score.

While there are several credit reporting agencies, the top three are Equifax, Transunion and Experian. Lenders also use Fair Isaac Corporation (FICO). Credit agencies collect data about borrowing habits, which feeds a credit report. FICO calculates creditworthiness based on proprietary algorithms, scoring

statistically from 300 to 850.

You can get your credit score from four different sources: (1) Check your credit card or other loan statement; (2) use a credit score service; (3) talk to a non-profit counselor; and (4) buy a score. See CFPB at [www.consumerfinance.gov/ask-cfpb/where-can-i-get-my-credit-score-en-316/](http://www.consumerfinance.gov/ask-cfpb/where-can-i-get-my-credit-score-en-316/).

Credit reports are also a GREAT tool for spotting identify theft as well as information that is inaccurate, all of which impacts your credit score(s).

Do your due diligence in reviewing your credit reports and ALL the information contained in your credit report! A good financial reputation can and will save you money. I often say that a home and/or car will not define you, but a three-digit credit score will! ★

## F.Y.I.

### Need a Ride?

The VSC is pleased to announce the resumption of weekday transportation services, to and from VA medical facilities as well as the Ohio Veterans Home in Sandusky, in a new, fully equipped van. Eligible veterans must schedule with the VSC to secure transportation. Call 330-643-2830 for more information. ★



### Memorial Dedication

Please join us October 30 for the dedication of the Fallen Soldier Battle Cross, or Battlefield Cross, in front of the VSC offices on Waterloo Road in Akron. The history of this now-iconic memorial dates back to the Civil War, serving to mark the location of a dead soldier for later burial. The Akron memorial was installed May 22. ★

