

Could it be that the key to accumulating wealth is that the money is in things that don't matter?

When you scan the vast array of people who have been part of the millions of moments that are your life, for whom do you feel the most gratitude? (Or resentment, or worse). Raise your hand if the list includes your parents. Raise your other hand up if they're at the top.

And how much did your parents get paid for playing the lead roles in your introduction to Planet Earth?

Zilch.

In fact, they went into the hole for the privilege of changing your diapers, driving you all over your home state, and honest-to-goodness trying to embarrass you as little as possible.

Clichés schedule reunions every time we repeat that parenting is the most important job anyone can have. Yet, it's difficult to bring to mind anything that commands a higher price in its peculiar mix of time, energy, emotion, and money.

We all must have absorbed the idea that the kid thing is not a large profit category. How much do we pay the child-care workers who do the parenting when the parents aren't around? As little as possible.

And speaking of low-paying jobs . . . We're keenly aware, especially now, of the risks taken by those serving in the armed forces, and of the suffering and loss that is too common among those in uniform and the loved ones who agonize until their return. Yet, reports continue that many military families are surprisingly close to the poverty line.

What's more, being called to active duty in the National Guard has derailed many a carefully nurtured career.

Even on home turf, police and firefighters are recognized as first responders in the event of any emergency, including just old-fashioned home blazes and burglaries. Yet, more and more municipalities are considering waiving residency requirements for these departments so that increases in salary can be muted.

So, who's at the other end of things? The top 10 on the latest list of the wealthiest people this side of the moon features names that have made (or inherited) their money via software, investments, telecommunications, furniture, steel, newspapers, and fashion.

Now, each of these is fine in context. Computers are great, cell phones are amazing, newspapers try to tell us what's going on, and steel holds everything up. Furniture is useful, too, and I have to admit that clothing has its place.

But is any of them among the most important of human enter-



Musings

By Robert Morton-Ranney

prises?

You could argue that at least in the case of health care, we are willing to pay for what matters. Physicians remain the most highly paid occupational group. Yet, reports are that one of the best ways they can increase income is to limit services. They simply collect patients who are able and willing to part with large lumps of cash in order to have a med school grad available at whim.

And who is at the lower end of the pay scale in the M.D. world? The community physician, who knows the ins and outs of the area and makes his or her services available to all.

What's the lesson of these snapshots if you want to assure your own financial future? Convince others to treat things that matter less as if they matter more.

Get them to believe that they absolutely must have another car. Now. Get them to believe their boat isn't big enough.

Get them to believe their cell phone is clunky, or people are looking askance at their laptop. Get them to believe they need to take more trips to more exotic places. Get them to believe that whatever they already have is obsolete, irrelevant, or simply in bad taste.

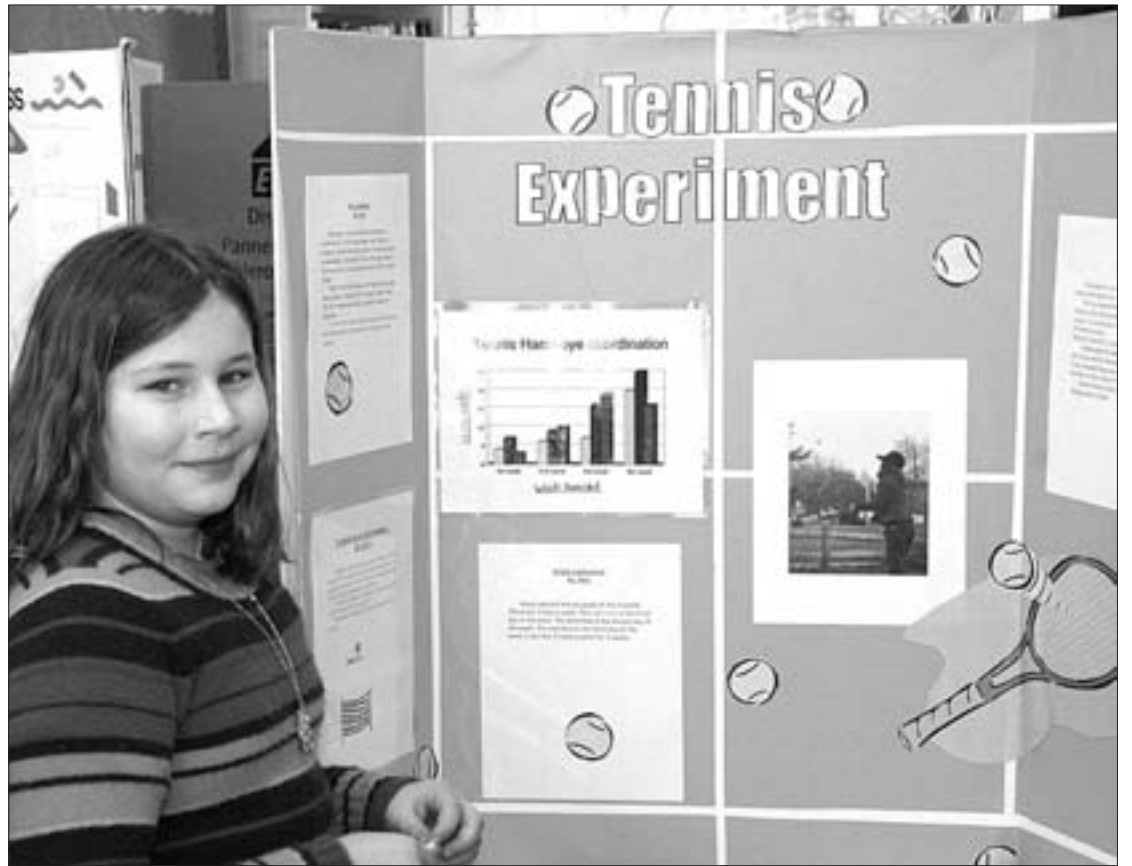
That's the way to increase your cash flow.

Now, you could say that this is actually a good sign as far as the health of our society goes. Maybe the fact that we don't place high monetary value on what really matters shows that we put it above money in our overall value system. Could be.

On the other hand, to some extent at least, competence follows compensation. What sorts of endeavors do we want our most able people pursuing?

Then there is the reality that money can bear a disturbing resemblance to oxygen. Without a certain amount, life just isn't livable. Love your children as much as you can stand, but if you're not able to put food in their mouths, the whole project just sort of falls apart.

Maybe we'll get this money thing figured out and maybe we won't. Until we do, we have the wisdom of Martin Sheen in "Wall Street," who told his on (and off) screen son, Charlie, that money is just "a pain in the (expletive deleted)."



The science of tennis

Alessandra Antonelli of Jamestown, a student at the Rocky Hill School, presents her project on how she was improving her tennis skills. Her presentation was made at the school's recent science fair.

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36 Southwest Avenue
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