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Winter 2026

# Living Well

Newsletter



**ASPIRE**  
WEALTH GROUP

AspireWealthGrp.com

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## From the desk of **Jason Dugan**

As we turn the page on another year, I find myself reflecting on the rhythm of the seasons and the lessons they bring. Winter often invites us to slow down, take stock, and prepare for what's ahead. In many ways, it's a season of groundwork, quiet, steady, and purposeful.

For our team, this time of year is about more than just closing out the books or gearing up for tax season. It's about making sure every client feels confident and cared for as we step into a new year together. Whether it's helping you organize tax documents, strategize for retirement, or simply answering questions that have been on your mind, we're committed to being a resource you can rely on.

This issue of *Living Well* is packed with insights to help you navigate the months ahead. From practical tips on tailoring your taxes for retirement to strategies for mastering those critical last five years before you retire, we've curated content that speaks to both planning and peace of mind. You'll also find ideas for winter pastimes, a hearty recipe to warm your table, and even a few reminders to keep your body moving safely in colder weather.

As we celebrate the holidays and look forward to a fresh start, I want to express my gratitude for your trust, your partnership, and the conversations that make our work meaningful. Our mission has always been about more than numbers; it's about helping you live well, in every sense of the word.

Here's to a season of reflection, preparation, and hope. May the year ahead bring you clarity, joy, and opportunities to thrive.

**Jason Dugan, CFP®, AIF®**  
President, Aspire Wealth Group



# Team Holiday Highlights

Our team had the opportunity to relax and spend time with family and friends over the holidays. We asked the team to share their highlight from the holiday season, and here's what each of them had to say.



JASON DUGAN

"Attending the Dolphins Vs. Steelers Monday Night Football game with some of the team."



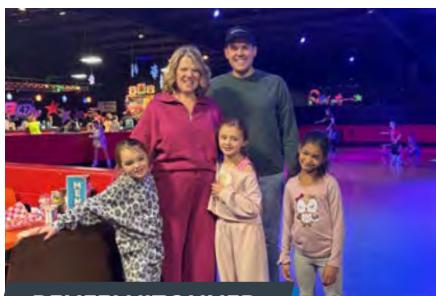
AMANDA BUTLER

"Our church's Christmas Eve Candlelight Service is always something my family looks forward to each year. And a family picture where all my people are smiling at the same time is a bonus!"



DEREK SNYDER

"Celebrating a Penn State bowl game victory with my brothers."



RENEE' HITCHNER

"Spending time roller skating with my family."



JOEL APPLEMAN

"Taking the girls on the Santa Express train ride in Williamsport."



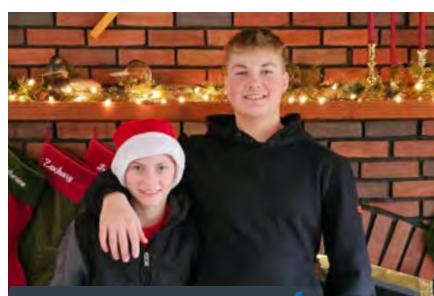
CHASE SNYDER

"Spending Christmas with family!"



KEELY SWARTWOOD

"Having our baby shower with family and friends."



KATHERINE CAMPBELL

"Spending New Year's with my two favorite little men—my sons. We watched movies, ate out, played games, and soaked up every moment together."



CHRIS CONFER

"Watching my 5 and 7 year olds' faces light up on Christmas morning was especially memorable this year."

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# Winter Pastimes to Carry You Through the Season

Winter has a natural way of slowing things down. Shorter days and colder weather nudge us indoors, creating a quieter rhythm that feels different from the rest of the year. While winter can sometimes feel long, it also offers an opportunity to rediscover simple pastimes we once enjoyed but gradually set aside as life became busier.

One of the most common pleasures people return to in winter is reading for enjoyment. Without packed schedules or outdoor distractions, reading becomes something to savor again. Whether it is a novel, a biography, or a favorite author from years ago, winter provides the perfect excuse to curl up with a book and read simply because you want to. Creating a small routine, such as reading each evening with a warm drink, can turn it into a comforting and relaxing habit.

Puzzles and games are another pastime many of us forget about. Jigsaw puzzles, crosswords, Sudoku, and card games offer a satisfying mix of mental engagement and relaxation. They provide a sense of progress without pressure and can be especially enjoyable when shared with family or friends. Even working on a puzzle alone can bring a calming focus to quiet afternoons.

Cooking and baking also tend to make a return during the winter months. There is something grounding about preparing warm meals when it is cold outside. Winter is a great time to revisit family recipes, try a new soup, or finally bake that bread you have been thinking about. Baking, in particular, can feel nostalgic and comforting,

and sharing what you make adds another layer of enjoyment.

Writing is another winter-friendly pastime that often gets overlooked. Journaling, writing letters, or recording family stories can be surprisingly fulfilling. Many people find winter encourages reflection, making it a natural season to capture memories and thoughts that might otherwise go unwritten. These written moments can become meaningful keepsakes for years to come.

Winter is also an ideal time to learn something new indoors. Online classes, tutorials, and virtual workshops make it easy to explore interests like photography, painting, genealogy, or a new language. The goal does not need to be productivity or mastery, but curiosity and enjoyment.

Getting outdoors, even in winter, can be deeply refreshing. Simple activities like walking in a quiet neighborhood, visiting a local park, or enjoying a nature trail provide fresh air and a change of scenery. Many retirees enjoy birdwatching in winter, when trees are bare and wildlife is easier to spot. With proper layers and a relaxed pace, time outdoors can boost both mood and energy.

Winter does not have to be a season you simply endure. It can be a time to slow down, reconnect with yourself, and rediscover activities that bring comfort and meaning. Sometimes the pastimes we forgot we loved are exactly what winter is meant for.



# Tailor Your Taxes for Retirement

## From withdrawals to conversions, taxes in retirement can be a balancing act.

After a fruitful career and plenty of practice paying taxes, you may feel prepared for the tax man in retirement. But a review of your post-retirement taxable income may yield some surprising insights. Examining your position can help you design ways to optimize your current investment strategy. Taking a new look at both fixed and flexible expenses provides the opportunity to ask questions and have discussions with your financial advisor about the tax implications of your total portfolio. When it comes to taxation, the more thorough the examination, the better.

### Solopreneur? Take deductions

If you're still working as a solopreneur, you can actually deduct Medicare Part B and D premiums – even if you don't itemize. Supplemental Medicare and Medicare Advantage costs are also deductible. But not everyone can deduct – this only applies if you don't have access to a health plan for your business or through your spouse's employer or business.

### Taxes on Social Security income

Despite any widespread myths to the contrary, Social Security is taxable income. You could pay tax on up to 85% of your Social Security income under certain circumstances, so beware of your filing status and annual income. For example, if you file a return as an individual and your adjusted gross income plus nontaxable interest, in addition to half of your Social Security income, is more than \$34,000, you'll pay tax on up to 85% of that benefit. Adjusted gross income covers everything, from wages (if you are still working) to rental income and, most importantly, any withdrawals from 401(k)s and IRAs. However, Roth IRAs are exempt.

### Offsetting required minimum distributions

Depending on your portfolio, required minimum distributions (RMDs) can bump you into a higher tax bracket than you were expecting. It's important to take RMDs into consideration every year and factor in what you'll be required to take out of your retirement accounts starting at 72 (or earlier if your plan allows). One way to balance an increased tax burden is with a qualified charitable distribution (QCD). After 70 1/2, you can donate up to \$108,000 a year to an eligible charity directly from your traditional IRA – and you won't have to pay any taxes on it. QCDs can also be a way to meet your RMD, with the caveat that you can't then itemize the donation as a charitable deduction on your return.

### To convert or not to convert

If you've got retirement funds in traditional IRAs or 401(k)s, you have the option to convert these to a Roth at any time. This strategy could potentially lower future taxes – but you'll have to pay taxes in the year you convert. Look at current tax rates and potential future income from your assets and talk to your advisor and tax professional to forecast whether Roth conversions would make sense for you.

### The right amount of withdrawals

Conventional wisdom says to follow the "4% rule" – withdrawing no more than that amount of your retirement portfolio every year. But this is only a general guidance – and deserves to be revisited, especially when there are market waves, inflation or other headwinds. Be sure to set up a time to renew and adjust your withdrawals as needed to manage your income bracket most effectively.

Tax implications can be overlooked too often when the focus has been on saving and investing for so many years. Whether you are pre-retirement or post-retirement, there's always an opportunity to review, and adjust.

Sources: thebalance.com; westernsouthern.com; moneywise.org; wealthenhancement.com; ssa.gov  
Raymond James does not provide tax services. Please discuss these matters with the appropriate professional.

If certain conditions are met, ROTH IRA and ROTH 401(k) distributions will be completely income tax free. Unlike Roth IRAs, Roth 401(k) participants are subject to required minimum distributions at age 72 (70 1/2 if you reach 70 1/2 before January 1, 2020). Investors should consult a tax advisor before deciding to do a conversion.

Withdrawals which exceed income will reduce the value of your portfolio.

## Tax Dates to Remember

**January 15:** Fourth quarter estimated tax payments due for 2025.

**January 31:** Deadline for employers to send W-2 forms and certain 1099 tax documents.

**April 15:** Deadline to file individual income tax return and to request a tax extension. Deadline to make HSA and IRA contributions for tax year 2025. Estimated tax payments due for the first quarter of 2026.

# Team Holiday Highlights

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**SAMMARA VECCHIO**

"Getting away to Dallas, Texas with my husband and some friends."



**DREW NEWCOMB**

"Our dog, Callie, showing off her new bandana she got for Christmas."



**CHRIS JACKOWSKI**

"Spending time with the new additions to the family...our new neice and nephew."



**JO'NELLE FETZER**

"We did Joy through the Grove at Knoebels right before Christmas which is always a big hit for local Christmas lights."

## Laying the Groundwork for **TAX SEASON**

Contrary to popular belief, tax planning isn't limited to the months between year-end and April 15. In fact, smart tax planning goes beyond deductions and credits and should be incorporated throughout the year. As Americans prepare to file their returns, let's take a look at what we should be thinking about for tax season and beyond.

### **Get it together, now**

The beginning of each new year is the time to get organized before filing your taxes. Make an appointment with your accountant and prepare by gathering all the relevant documentation.

Among other things, you'll need:

- Year-end statements from financial accounts
- W-2s, 1098s and 1099s, K-1s (many can be found online)
- Last year's tax returns
- Receipts for donations and business-related expenses
- Social Security numbers for your spouse and dependents
- Business identification number
- Tax ID number for daycares or schools, if filing for the child care credit

Keep in mind that most 1099s should be mailed before the end of January, but they could be delayed or revised. You and your accountant will have to decide if you need to file an extension, a common occurrence these days.

### **Strategies for any season**

If lowering your taxes is a priority, start a conversation with your financial and tax advisors about ways to save money come April 15. Consider these perennial options:

- **Put pretax dollars to work.** Flexible savings accounts—available during your employer's open enrollment period—allow you to use pretax dollars to pay for qualified expenses. You can also use pretax retirement contributions to reduce your taxable income.
- **Fill in the blanks.** Work with your financial advisor to make sure all the cost-basis information is complete and accurate before calculating losses and gains for tax-loss harvesting purposes.
- **Pursue tax-efficient investing.** Investing should be focused on meeting your goals, not just on reducing taxes. But in some cases the two dovetail nicely. For example, interest\* from municipal bonds is generally exempt from federal and state income tax (if you're a resident of the state the bond is issued in). You could also sell underperforming stocks to offset realized gains.

For all taxpayers, it's important to take a look at what tax strategies could benefit your specific situation without losing sight of your overall financial goals. Reviewing your investments in light of your goals, the tax environment, and the economic landscape can help you see where adjustments need to be made to position yourself for the upcoming year and beyond.

\*While interest on municipal bonds is generally exempt from federal income tax, it may be subject to the federal alternative minimum tax, or state or local taxes. Profits and losses on federally tax-exempt bonds may be subject to capital gains tax treatment. In addition, certain municipal bonds (such as Build America Bonds) are issued without a federal tax exemption, which subjects the related interest income to federal income tax.



# Mastering the Last 5 Years Before Retirement

Retirement is right around the corner, and those final five years before you clock out for good are some of the most important in your financial journey. Whether you are dreaming of quiet mornings with coffee or globe-trotting adventures, now is the time to make sure your plans and finances are truly in sync. The good news is that it is never too late to make meaningful improvements. With the right focus, you can use these last few working years to step confidently into retirement.

## Revisit Your Retirement Goals

First things first, take a moment to picture your ideal retirement. Will you be relaxing by the shore, traveling to new places, or spending more time with your grandkids? Your lifestyle goals directly influence your budget and savings needs. If your vision has changed since you first started saving, that is completely normal. Adjusting your plan now can have a meaningful impact later.

## Boost Your Savings Where You Can

If you are age 50 or older, you may be eligible to take advantage of catch-up contributions, which allow you to save more in retirement accounts than younger workers. For 2026, this means contributing above the standard IRS limits to workplace plans such as a 401(k). These additional contributions can be especially powerful during your peak earning years.

This is also a good time to revisit how your investments are allocated. As retirement draws closer, many people choose to gradually shift toward a more conservative mix to help manage market volatility and protect what they have already built.

## Create a Realistic Retirement Budget

Understanding your expected monthly expenses is key. Many experts suggest retirees may need about 70 to 80 percent of their pre-retirement income to maintain a similar lifestyle. Be sure to account for healthcare, travel, and everyday enjoyment. It is also wise to factor in inflation, which has historically averaged around 3 percent per year.

## Plan Your Social Security Strategy

When you claim Social Security can significantly affect your monthly benefit. Although you can start as early as age 62, waiting until full retirement age or even age 70 can result in higher payments. For some people, delaying benefits makes sense, but the right choice depends on your health, income needs, and family considerations. A financial advisor can help evaluate your options.

## Mind Your Healthcare and Insurance Needs

Medicare enrollment can be confusing, so it is important to understand your enrollment window. In addition to Medicare, you may want to explore supplemental coverage or long-term care insurance. Healthcare remains one of the largest retirement expenses, averaging about \$7,000 per year per person, so planning ahead can help prevent unwelcome surprises.

## Tackle Debt and Major Expenses

If possible, aim to reduce high-interest debt before retiring. Carrying balances into retirement can strain your cash flow and add stress. You may also want to plan ahead for major expenses such as home repairs or a vehicle purchase. Addressing these costs early can provide greater financial flexibility later.

## Get Your Legal Documents in Order

Finally, make sure your wills, trusts, and powers of attorney are up to date. These documents help ensure your wishes are followed and can ease the burden on your loved ones. If it's been a while since you reviewed them, now's the perfect time.

The final five years before retirement don't have to feel overwhelming. With thoughtful planning, a bit of saving, and informed decisions, you can create a retirement that reflects the life you envision. Here's to a confident, joyful transition into your next chapter!



# The Grandparent Effect

## The Emotional and Practical Influence that Lasts a Lifetime

The scent of Nana's perfume, the sound of Grandpa's laugh—such sensory memories often leave some of the deepest and most lasting impressions in a child's life. It's no surprise that the bond between grandparents and grandchildren is widely regarded as one of the most meaningful family relationships, second only to that between parents and children.

Today's grandparents are living longer, healthier, and more active lives. This shift transforms grandparenting from a simple life milestone into a rewarding, multidimensional role. Beyond cherished moments and fun interactions, research suggests there are real cognitive, physical, and emotional benefits for grandparents who stay engaged with their grandchildren.

### The Emotional Side of Grandparenting

Stepping into the role of grandparent brings a notable identity shift. Unlike parenting, grandparenting often comes with more freedom, less pressure, and a chance to focus on connection rather than discipline. Many describe it as more fun and less stress—a chance to be fully present and celebrate the joy of family without the everyday responsibilities of raising a child.

In this new phase, grandparents can nurture deep bonds with grandchildren while also strengthening relationships with their own adult children. But this transition isn't always without emotion. Some grandparents experience a sense of loss as their role changes from primary caregiver to supportive mentor. Open communication is key—discussing expectations and offering support helps ensure everyone feels understood and valued.

For many, this connection brings emotional fulfillment and a renewed sense of purpose, especially at a stage of life when feelings of loneliness can surface. Not only do grandchildren benefit from another loving adult in their lives, but grandparents also relish the opportunity to pass on wisdom, traditions, and life lessons.

### The Practical Side of Being a Grandparent

Grandparents often contribute in practical ways as well. Beyond the priceless gift of time and attention, many provide financial support. One recent study found that the average grandparent spends around \$4,000 per year on gifts, outings, clothing, and entertainment for grandchildren.

Some choose to integrate grandchildren into their estate planning or set aside savings for milestone expenses like college tuition or a first car. While these gestures can be meaningful, it's important to balance generosity with personal financial needs, especially retirement planning. After all, emotional support, presence, and wisdom often matter more than monetary gifts.

Grandparenting also encourages physical activity and engagement, which can support overall health. Whether through playtime, caregiving, or simply being part of a child's routine, these interactions can help keep grandparents active and connected.

No matter what you're called—Nana, Pop, Grammy, or Grandpa—your role makes a lasting impact. The grandparent effect truly creates a legacy of love, joy, and shared experience that enriches every generation.

Source: Legacy Project, World Humanitarian Movement, Reuters

# 5 Tips for Exercising Safely in Cold Weather

Don't let falling temperatures stop you from exercising outdoors. By taking a few extra steps to stay safe, you can walk, run, ski, ice skate, and more.

1

## Warm up and cool down.

Stretch or walk in place to prepare and restore your muscles before and after a workout.

2

## Pick the right clothes.

Dress in several layers of loose clothing to trap warm air between them. Wear a waterproof coat or jacket if it's snowy or rainy, and don't forget a hat, scarf, and gloves.

3

## Be extra careful in snow and ice.

Check sidewalks before using them. Wear nonskid, rubber-soled, low-heeled shoes to help prevent slipping.

4

## Check the forecast.

If it's too windy, cold, icy, or wet outside, consider staying indoors and using an online workout video or your own routine.

5

## Be prepared.

Know the signs of hypothermia, inform others of your outdoor whereabouts, and carry a fully charged mobile phone.



Source: National Institute on Aging (<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/safety/5-tips-exercising-safely-cold-weather>)

# YEAR-END CELEBRATION

## Dinner & Concert featuring Riley Clemons

On December 4th, we hosted our Year-End Celebration at Herman & Luther's in Montoursville, PA. It was a wonderfully fun and festive evening, highlighted by a beautiful Christmas concert from Christian pop and worship singer-songwriter Riley Clemons. We're so grateful to everyone who joined us.





# In the Community

In an effort to support and raise awareness for local nonprofit organizations, Aspire Cares was established in 2021. Since then, our contributions have totaled over \$100,000 to a variety of organizations, enriching our communities.



For the last quarter of 2025, our team supported The Hope Foundation in Williamsport, PA. The Hope Foundation's mission is to drive funding to Hope Enterprises in the support of people with disabilities. From infancy through advanced age, families look to Hope for engaging and special services that facilitate development and enhance the quality of life for each person. Learn more at: [www.hopeability.org](http://www.hopeability.org).

## Go Bison!

Aspire Wealth Group is proud to be the presenting sponsor of the 2025-26 Bucknell Men's Basketball Season. We're excited to be part of the Bucknell Family and the Lewisburg community.

**Interested in attending a home game?**  
Let us know!



# Chicken Tortilla Soup

## INGREDIENTS

- ✓ 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ✓ 1 red onion, diced
- ✓ 4 cloves, garlic, minced
- ✓ 1 jalapeño, minced
- ✓ 1-2 teaspoons cumin and/or chili powder (you can make this as spiced as you like)
- ✓ A pinch of dried oregano (Mexican if you can find it)
- ✓ One 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes
- ✓ 2 1/2 – 3 cups vegetable broth
- ✓ 1 pound boneless skinless chicken thighs
- ✓ 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- ✓ 1 can pinto beans, drained and rinsed
- ✓ Crispy tortilla strips, cilantro, lime, cotija or sour cream for topping



www.pinchayum.com

## MAKE IT

**Total Time:** 30 minutes

**Yield:** 4-6 servings

1. Heat oil in a soup pot over medium heat. Add onion, garlic, jalapeño, and seasonings; sauté for about 5-10 minutes or until very soft and fragrant.
2. Add the crushed tomatoes, broth, chicken thighs, and salt. Simmer for 10-15 minutes or until chicken thighs are cooked through.
3. Remove chicken from the pot. When cool enough to handle, shred and chop into small bite-sized pieces. Stir back into the pot with the beans. Add more broth depending on how thin you like it. Top with EVERYTHING. Crispy tortilla strips, cilantro, cotija, crema, lime, etc.

## NOTES

**Instant Pot Instructions:** Heat the oil and sauté the onion, garlic, and jalapeño for 5-10 minutes until soft and fragrant. Add in the crushed tomatoes, broth, chicken thighs, and salt. Seal the lid and set the cook time to 15 minutes with 10 minutes of natural pressure release. Remove the chicken from the pot to shred. Stir the shredded chicken back into the soup along with the pinto beans.

**Slow Cooker Instructions:** Heat the oil in a pan on the stove and sauté the onion, garlic, and jalapeño for 5-10 minutes until soft and fragrant. Transfer to the slow cooker and add in the crushed tomatoes, broth, chicken thighs, and salt. Stir and cook on low for 6-8 hours. Remove the chicken from the slow cooker to shred. Stir the shredded chicken back into the soup along with the pinto beans.



## Congratulations, Jason!

**RAYMOND JAMES**  
Chairman's Council

*Awarded for the 7th consecutive year!*

We're proud to share that Jason has been named to Raymond James' Chairman's Council for the 7th consecutive year. The 2026 Chairman's Council represents the top 110 Financial Advisors within Raymond James Financial Services. Thank you to our clients for the trust that makes this recognition possible.

Chairman's Council membership for Raymond James Financial Services advisors is based on prior fiscal year production. Requalification is required annually. The ranking may not be representative of any one client's experience, is not an endorsement, and is not indicative of an advisor's future performance. No fee is paid in exchange for this award/rating.



Front row from left to right: Amanda Butler, Keely Swartwood, Renee' Hitchner, Jason Dugan, Katherine Campbell, Sammara Vecchio, Jo'nelle Fetzer  
Back row from left to right: Drew Newcomb, Derek Snyder, Chris Jackowski, Chris Confer, Chase Snyder, Joel Appleman



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## Dates to Remember

Our offices will be closed in observance of the following holidays:

- Monday, January 19<sup>th</sup> – **Martin Luther King, Jr. Day**
- Monday, February 16<sup>th</sup> – **Presidents' Day**

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