

BUSINESS



Photos by JUSTINE GRIFFIN | TIMES

The Warby Parker store in a bookstore in the Oxford Exchange near downtown Tampa is the second in Florida, after one in Miami.

Warby Parker arrives

The New York company known for designer eyeglasses and sunglasses that are moderately priced opens a site in the Oxford Exchange in Tampa.

BY JUSTINE GRIFFIN
Times Staff Writer

Shelves lined with square eyeglasses and round glasses, some tortoise shell colored and others with titanium frames, now make up half of what used to be the bookstore inside the Oxford Exchange. Warby Parker, a New York City designer eyewear company, is the latest brand to move into the Oxford Exchange, a hip and collaborative space that houses study areas, a restaurant, a bookstore and two cafes near downtown Tampa at 420 W Kennedy Blvd. The eyeglass and sunglass showroom opened to the public on Saturday, but that didn't stop Oxford Exchange patrons from trying on a variety of frames on Thursday, as employees worked on the final touches inside the showroom.

"All of our stores are very different from one another, but there's something about the Oxford Exchange that really stands out," said Kaki Read, communications manager for Warby Parker. "We don't open a lot of showrooms like this, but the partnership seemed so natural."

The showroom in Tampa is the company's 27th retail location and the second to open in Florida. Warby Parker came to Florida in 2012 when the company opened a kiosk in the Standard Hotel in Miami.

Warby Parker opens freestanding stores and kiosks and showrooms in collaboration with other businesses across the country. The brand is known for its affordable prices on trendy eyeglasses and sunglasses. Prices in the Tampa showroom ranged from \$95 to \$145 for frames.

Read spent a few minutes with the *Times* on Thursday to talk about the new showroom.



Warby Parker stores "are very different from one another," the company's communications manager said.

Tell me what is the Warby Parker experience like, for our readers who may not be familiar with the name.

Customers who have a prescription for eyewear are recommended to bring it with them when they visit us. But if you don't have it handy, that's no problem. Our associates can call your doctor and get that information for you when you're ready to place an order. We'll have five people staffing this new show-

room in Tampa. So there will always be someone here to help you find a frame you like. We have two opticians on staff who can adjust your frames, take eye measurements and help find frames that fit specific needs, too. Orders are delivered within 10 days once they're placed in a store. But you can take nonprescription sunglasses home with you immediately.

What is Warby Parker known for?

We're known for having a lot of different looks. Each year we release four seasonal collections of designs, but last year, we released 20 collections in total. So there's always something new to try on or check out. We collaborate with artists and nonprofits too, like DonorsChoose.org and the musician Beck.

What's different about this showroom in Tampa?

We sell books in our stores, too.

What's different about the showroom in Tampa is that the Oxford Exchange curates our book sales for us. But Warby Parker is known for having many literary connections. In our other stores, we sell books from some of our favorite independent publishers.

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Patients surprised by big fees

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — As health insurance plans become increasingly complicated, more patients are facing unexpected fees when they step outside their plan's coverage network. In many cases, patients don't realize they've received out-of-network care until they're slapped with a bill for hundreds or thousands of dollars.

Nearly a third of insured Americans who have financial problems tied to medical bills faced charges that their insurance would not cover, according to a recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation. These out-of-network charges were a surprise to nearly 70 percent of patients, who did not know the services were not covered, according to the nonpartisan policy group.

Here are key questions and answers about out-of-network charges and potential steps for protecting yourself.

How does this problem occur?

It usually happens when people need to be hospitalized for medical care. Even though services from their primary physician may be covered by their in-network insurance coverage, services provided by other professionals, such as anesthesiologists, radiologists and emergency doctors, often aren't. In those cases, the patient will be billed at out-of-network rates.

The often-hefty bills leave many consumers angry and confused. Determining whether various specialists are in your network can be difficult, sometimes impossible, particularly during emergency situations.

"You can't wake up from a heart attack and say to the ambulance provider, 'Excuse me, are you in my network?'" said Karen Pollitz, who has studied the issue for the Kaiser Family Foundation.

How much do these fees cost consumers?

Experts say there is little hard data on the cost of out-of-network charges or how frequently they occur. But a 2011 study by the state of New York found that the average out-of-network emergency bill was about \$7,000. After assistance from insurance and other services, most consumers still had to pay roughly \$3,780.

Is there anything I can do to protect myself?

If you have a scheduled surgical procedure coming up, experts say there are certain precautions you can take to insulate yourself from surprise fees. But they warn that even these will not guarantee you won't be touched by out-of-network providers.

If possible, call the hospital in advance and make sure the surgeon and assistants handling the procedure are part of your insurance network. You can also talk to the hospital and request that any tests are sent to in-network laboratories for processing. Surprise fees often arise when hospitals send blood samples or medical scans to outside facilities for development.

Even in these situations, however, hospitals often cannot tell you which radiologist or anesthesiologist will be handling your procedure. That means even if you've tried to premanage the process you may receive care from an out-of-network provider.

I've already received a bill that includes these charges. What can I do now?

The first step is to call your insurance company. Some employer-sponsored health plans have policies where patients are not responsible for out-of-network charges, especially if they occur during an emergency. Even if your plan doesn't have such a benefit, insurance companies can try to work with the hospital to negotiate lower fees.

Scam artists target previous victims

BY ANN CARRNS
New York Times

The latest scam targeting older consumers is particularly cruel, because it homes in on people who already have lost money in previous fraudulent schemes.

"Asset-recovery firms" target people who have lost money in another type of fraud — often, a bogus work-at-home scheme or a fake time-share investment, according to an advisory from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

The firm promises the victims that it can recover much of the lost money, for a hefty upfront fee. But after taking the payment, the firm does little — or takes steps that the consumers could do for no cost.

Stacy Canan, deputy assistant director of the bureau's Office for Older Americans, said the agency became aware of the problem after noticing an increase in complaints filed online not by consumer victims, but by asset-recovery companies — apparently, as part of the "service" the firms were supposed to be providing. (There is never any fee to file a complaint, she noted.)

When the bureau followed up with some of the consumers, they didn't know a complaint

had been filed with the bureau on their behalf, and told similar stories about being contacted by a firm offering to help them recover lost funds. Consumers generally reported paying a few hundred dollars, but some paid \$1,000 or more. Many of the complaints originated with a company in Florida that has since been shut down, but the victims came from multiple states.

"It's a nationwide issue," Canan said. The bureau identified more than 400 complaints.

It's not clear how the operators of these firms identify consumers who have been previous victims.

But Amy Nofziger, director of regional operations with the AARP Foundation and manager of its Fraud Watch Network call center, said criminals often re-targeted the same victims, having had success the first time. Criminals, she said, also maintain and sell lists of people who have been previously tricked. "They're re-scamming that same victim," she said.

Maggie Flowers of the National Council on Aging said older people were often targeted for fraud because they are perceived as having money, even if it is just a monthly Social Security check.

Avoid fraud by phone

Here are some questions and answers about avoiding telemarketing fraud:

What should I do if I receive a phone call offering to recover money?

"Hang up the phone," Amy Nofziger of the Fraud Watch Network said, and contact the consumer regulator in your state. The network's website contains links to relevant state authorities.

What if I have paid a fraudulent recovery firm?

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau advises that if you used a credit or debit card to pay, contact your bank immediately to explain and prevent further charges. If you paid by credit card and notify the issuing bank within 60 days, you may be able to dispute the charge.

You also should contact local law enforcement and file a complaint online with the FTC.

Is the income tax telephone swindle still active?

Yes, and callers are more aggressive in tax season, Nofziger said. The swindle involves calls from people purporting to be IRS agents threatening to arrest or deport consumers. She said the IRS does not call and threaten people.

4 essential financial strategies to follow

BY RON LIEBER
New York Times

Managing your money should be pretty straightforward, but that doesn't make the task all that easy.

That's the biggest takeaway from the handful of simple financial instruction lists making the rounds among the New Year's resolution set.

One list comes in the form of a 4-by-6 note card that went viral in 2013, now the foundation of a book called *The Index Card: Why Personal Finance Doesn't Have to Be Complicated*. Another is the 18 steps at the back of Jonathan Clements' *Money Guide 2016*. An older but beloved list comes from Dilbert cartoonist Scott Adams.

Even though their lists are fairly short, these experts agree, almost to the letter, on at least four things.

- You must have an emergency fund.
- Index funds should make up most of your investment port-

folio.

- Buy a home, but only one that you can afford. And don't forget life insurance, as much as you might want to.
- Basic term insurance is the answer for most people.

So, this month, I did two things. First, I asked these writers why so many people fail to follow those four commandments, none of which are new. There must be a reason we all have to keep repeating them.

Then I asked them all to squeeze their best ideas into an index card. Harold Pollack, whose initial effort inspired *The Index Card*, which he cowrote with Helaine Olen, submitted a slightly revised version of his original. Adams and Clements took their shots, as did Jane Bryant Quinn. A few of my fellow *New York Times* money scribes and I also made our own cards.

Why do we fail? When it comes to the lack of emergency funds, there are millions of Americans with no bank accounts at all, whether because of poor credit or poor access. Many millions more cannot afford to save anything.

As for everyone else, there are at least two big problems. The first is one of will. Clements, a longtime *Wall Street Journal* columnist, pointed to the always-increasing availability of shiny consumer goods coupled with stagnant incomes for so many. "But they don't say no," he said.

"They go ahead and buy, which leaves less for long-term goals."

Some of the people who give in might do better with more structure. If you're one of them, don't assume you'll push a button each month or set aside a pile of \$20 bills. Instead, set up automatic account transfers.

"Unless you automate it, it's not going to happen," Olen said.

And for progress in investing, ever more money is going into index funds of various sorts that don't try to pick individual stocks that will do better, on average, than others.

All of the experts here think buying a home is a perfectly fine idea, but it has to be affordable. And many of us are delusional about what that means.

"For almost the entirety of human history, most people did not live the way that we do," Olen said.

Nobody much likes talking about death, let alone planning for the possibility of dying young. So it's no surprise that not enough people shop for life insurance.

The simplest solution, term insurance, is often the best. You might pay \$50 to \$100 a month or so for 20 years, depending on the results of a medical exam, and get \$500,000 or \$1 million if you die (and nothing if you don't).

For Clements, it's a moral responsibility for any parent of young children who does not have a big pile of financial assets.