



The Orion Nebula is the closest massive star-forming region to Earth.

CARLOS ROTELLAR PHOTO

Orion Nebula visible without telescope

Step outside on a crisp winter night and look up to the southeast toward Orion, the Hunter. Even without a telescope, you can find its familiar belt of three bright stars in a straight line forming the Orion Belt. Just below them lies the Orion Sword, a small, misty patch of light that looks like a faint cloud through binoculars. But behind that soft glow hides one of the most spectacular sights in the night sky: the Great Orion Nebula, also known as Messier 42.

The Orion Nebula is more than just a pretty cloud; it's a stellar nursery, a place where new stars are born. Located about 1,350 light-years away, it's the closest massive star-forming region to Earth. Inside



Carlos Rotellar

its swirling clouds of gas and dust, gravity is pulling material together to create new suns, many still surrounded by disks of material that could one day form planets.

Wisps of glowing gas spread out like cosmic wings, tinted with shades of pink, blue, and violet from excited hydrogen and oxygen atoms. At its center shines a tight group of newborn stars known as the Trapezium Cluster, so bright and hot they illuminate the entire nebula like lanterns in a fog. These young stars are only a few

million years old.

To the left we can see a bluish nebula known as the Running Man. The nebula's striking "running" shape comes from dark dust lanes that block the light of the glowing clouds behind them, creating the illusion of a man sprinting through space. The Running Man is mostly a reflection nebula, meaning it shines by scattering the blue light of nearby young stars rather than glowing on its own.

– Dr. Carlos Rotellar is a Bowling Green nephrologist who has had an interest in astrophotography and has been taking images of the universe from his driveway for several years. Website: Skyastrophotos.com.

How to prepare your money in 2026

By **ADRIANA MORGA**
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The start of a new year usually brings new motivation to achieve goals like eating healthier or finally cleaning your basement. Many resolutions also focus on financial goals, such as paying off credit card debt, saving for a new house, or simply getting more educated about money.

"New Year's is a really good time to review and realign your financial goals overall," said Erica Grundza, certified financial planner at Betterment, an investing and savings app.

When building your goals for 2026, Grundza recommends focusing less on the past and more on an optimistic, yet realistic, vision for the future. She recommends that you focus on reestablishing the "why" behind your approach to money and how you want to make it work for your life. This can be as simple as saving \$10 each week in a savings account, or a



CHARLES KRUPA / AP

A canning jar filled with money sits on a shelf in East Derry, N.H., in 2018.

bigger goal like saving to buy a house in the coming years. It's all about your own journey.

The Associated Press spoke with people who are making

financial resolutions for 2026. Here's a look at what they're planning and how you can draw inspiration for your own resolutions:

MAKING ACHIEVABLE PLANS
Resolutions can easily turn into unattainable goals that feel more like a dream, said

See **BUDGET**, 3C

A great generation

The following story was mailed to me by a woman named Carole. The letter was written in pencil.

Carole's mother was young. Twenty-two years old. She was married and pregnant with her second child. The year was 1945.

The War was freshly over. The Depression was still a recent memory. Carole's mother wanted to buy her husband a gift for his birthday. He was turning 25.

Her husband had just gotten back from Europe. He had helped liberate the French. Viva la France.

He was battleworn. He was scarred all over. He wasn't the same. It wasn't the shrapnel, it was that he'd seen too much.

He got a job working as a janitor for a public school. It wasn't a great job, but it put food on their table and diapers on their baby.

It was going to be a sparse birthday. The young mother only had \$9. She was a homemaker who kept her loose change in a tin biscuit box. She saved up quarters and dimes and nickels in the box. Only silver. No pennies.

One day, the mother was out shopping for her husband. She was going to buy him a pipe or a bottle of whiskey or something like that. But she met a man on the street.

The man was selling pencils. He had one leg. He was partly blind. He was singing songs to passersby. He was covered in rags. He, too, had been in the War. And he had the injuries to prove it.

She watched him grovel to pedestrians. And she watched people ignore the man. Something moved her. Something compelled the young mother to give him the box of money. It was only \$9. But in 1945, 9 bucks was a lot of bread.

He cried when she gave it to him.

"I can't take this," he said.

"I want you to have it."

"Why are you carrying around a box of money?" he asked.

"I was going to buy my husband a birthday gift. But I think it's more important that you have it."

The man accepted the money.

On the day of her husband's birthday, she had nothing for him but a homemade birthday card, and meatloaf made with crushed Saltines and topped with ketchup. And she prepared the world's smallest vanilla cake.

Her husband was about to blow out the candles when they heard something outside. It was singing, coming from the sidewalk. They went to the window to see an Army band playing outside. There were trumpets, French horns, flugelhorns, a snare drum, a bass drum, and a tuba. They were playing hymns.

And when the happy couple came to the window, the band began playing "Happy Birthday."

The man with one leg was there, too. He was singing louder than anyone else. He



Sean Dietrich

See **GENERATION**, 3C