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## Come to CUB clinic to cure phone-bill blues

(<http://www.dailysouthtown.com/business/316837,291BIZ9.article>)

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By David Kolata

If you're like most people, when you get your phone bill, you probably just throw up your hands and write the check. Who can understand all those confusing charges? Who can say whether they're paying too much?

If you're baffled by your bills, don't worry -- help is on the way.

For the past five years, CUB has been crisscrossing the state with its "Put Your Phone Bill on a Diet" tour, showing consumers how to trim their bloated bills. In April, the tour will stop in the southwest suburbs, at Westfield Chicago Ridge Mall.

In partnership with the Daily Southtown, CUB will provide a free Community Phone Bill Clinic at the mall on April 13 and 14. CUB's trained staff will be camped out in the mall's center court from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday and from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, calculators in hand, ready to analyze your phone bills line by line.

I guarantee we'll be able to identify some big savings for a lot of people. If past phone bill clinics are any indication, we'll find stories like these:

At a clinic in Waukegan last week, we found one gentleman who was paying \$28 for an expensive AT&T local calling package plus 8 cents a minute for long distance. A close look at his bill showed that he only made 26 local calls that month. CUB's recommendation: switch to the Consumer's Choice Basic -- a consumer-friendly local calling plan AT&T must offer under a legal settlement with CUB -- and choose a lower-cost long distance company for around 4 cents a month. Those recommendations could slash about \$40 a month -- or more than \$400 a year -- off his bills.

At a clinic in Chicago last month, we found a woman who had been renting her phone for the past 10 years. We explained that by canceling the rental agreement, which cost \$20 every three months, she could save \$80 a year, more than enough, in the first year alone, to pay for a very good, brand-new telephone. By switching to a lower-cost calling package, she could save another \$22 a month, for a total annual savings of \$355.

At every phone bill clinic, we find dozens of Linebacker subscribers paying more than \$80 a year to insure their home's inside phone wires. This very expensive -- and very lucrative -- AT&T service doesn't even cover "normal wear and tear" on the wires. Since phone industry data shows that these inside wires only need repair, on average, once every 30 years, most consumers choose to drop it once they understand what it is. And that's the right move, since your annual savings will more than pay for any potential repairs in the unlikely event an inside wire problem occurs.

At every phone bill clinic, we hear the same complaints. The bills are too confusing. It takes forever to get a live person on the line at the phone company and when you do, you can't get a straight answer out of them. All they want to do is sell you new services.

If you've experienced any of these frustrations, or if you just want to make sure you don't pay a penny more than you should for phone service, grab your phone bills and head on over to the Westfield Chicago Ridge Mall, located at 95th Street and Ridgeland Avenue in Chicago Ridge.

Trust me, it'll be worth the trip.

*Citizens Utility Board executive director David Kolata writes a monthly consumer news column. To reach CUB, call (800) 669-5556 or via e-mail at [info@CitizensUtilityBoard.org](mailto:info@CitizensUtilityBoard.org).*