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Woodstock residents can cut bloated phone bills

By TIM KANE - tkane@nwherald.com

The Citizens Utility Board is having two free "phone-bill clinics" in McHenry County this month intended to inform area residents how to cut calling costs by hundreds of dollars – including how to get a negotiated \$20 long-distance credit.

CUB has shown consumers how to save an average of \$200 a year at free phone-bill clinics across the state, according to a news release.

Clinics in McHenry County are from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m., Thursday at Woodstock Public Library, 414 W. Judd St.; and from 10 a.m. to noon Nov. 13 at Crystal Lake Public Library, 126 W. Paddock St.

"We've been doing these clinics for a while, and perhaps it's more high-profile now because of the economy," said Patrick Deignan, a communications assistant at CUB. "Helping someone save about \$200 on their phone bill is something they appreciate even more in these hard times."

"Most people shouldn't be paying more than \$25-\$30 a month for phone service," CUB Executive Director David Kolata said. "[Our] experts will give consumers a free one-on-one analysis to help them trim the fat from their phone bills. You can't get a free service like this anywhere else."

Consumers frequently complain that they can't get reliable information from the phone company, which often just throws them a sales pitch for a more expensive plan, according to CUB. At CUB's clinics, citizens will receive helpful tips about:

- CUB Cellphone Saver – an online tool that automatically analyzes individual wireless bills, potentially cutting a caller's costs by hundreds of dollars a year.
- The new CUB-designed Consumer's Choice local-calling plans that AT&T is forced to offer under a legal settlement. These plans are designed to save most consumers money.
- Illinois' best long-distance plans, including how to get an automatic \$20 CUB-negotiated credit. That amounts to almost 11 hours of free calls.
- Line-Backer, a costly – and optional – AT&T service that most people don't need, according to CUB.

Attendees should bring their phone bills so CUB experts can analyze them and give tips on how to cut them.

About CUB

When the Illinois General Assembly created the Citizens Utility Board in 1983, it gave the nonprofit, nonpartisan organization a clear mission: Represent the interests of residential utility customers across the state. The statute directs CUB to carry out that mission by intervening in rate-making proceedings before the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC), in the courts and before other public bodies and by providing consumers with information and assistance regarding their utility companies.

Since its inception in 1984, CUB has been working for lower rates and better service from the state's investor-owned electric, gas and telephone companies. During the past 24 years, CUB has saved consumers more than \$10 billion by blocking rate hikes and winning consumer refunds.

Source: Citizens Utility Board Web site

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