

[Back to regular view](#) • [Print this page](#)

Clinic helps residents cut their phone bills

(<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/evanston/news/1447396,ev-phonebills-021209-s1.article>)

February 26, 2009

By [RONNIE WACHTER](#) rwachter@pioneerlocal.com

Your phone bill has obesity.

Sarah Moskowitz, Ben Reike, Jim Chilsen and the rest of the Citizens Utility Board want to carve off the fat.

The board, which held a phone-bill-cutting clinic recently at the Evanston Public Library, showed a steady stream of land-line and digital users some possibilities for trimming their expenses. Most involved eliminating extra features the CUB advisers said are rarely needed, but some included changing long-distance plans or switching carriers altogether.

"People have their own economic stimulus package at their fingertips," said Chilsen, CUB communications director. "The cell phone bill is just ripe for cutting, and I'm not talking about sacrificing service. The goal is to trim the fat off the phone bill."

The advisers usually find fat in services the average customer rarely or never uses, Chilsen said. When unhappy customers call their providers, the workers who answer are trained to lure them into new plans and features that are actually even more expensive.

"People are confused, they're frustrated," Chilsen said.

In its handed-out pamphlets, CUB names two companies as its recommended choices for land-line users: AT&T offers three inexpensive plans for frill-free local calls, and Pioneer Telephone gets their nod for long-distance. Chilsen said CUB receives no money from either company for making these recommendations.

For mobile-phone users, who are more likely to be Web-savvy, CUB offers an online bill-checking tool that takes seconds to use. At CubCellPhoneSaver.com, customers can follow clearly worded directions that let the program analyze their latest bills and recommend changes from among the five major providers. The online tool, however, doesn't work for consumers whose cell phone and land-line bills have been combined.

CUB put this Web site into use last year, and Chilsen said 77 percent of those who visited found ways to save - the average savings being \$300 annually.

"It can be very confusing for people to navigate the telecom market," he said.

Chilsen said Moskowitz, CUB's outreach director, organized 58 phone-bill clinics last year, a record for the organization, and plans to put on even more this year during a 25-city tour of Illinois.



© Copyright 2009 Digital Chicago, Inc. | [Terms of Use](#) • [Privacy Policy](#) • [Submission Guidelines](#) • [Advertise With Us](#)