

An Alternative for Computer User Groups Facing Closure – Become a Meet-Up Club



Ray Baxter

APCUG Director/Treasurer

**President: Payson Area Computer Assn.,
Payson AZ**

**APCUG's 2016 International Technology
Conference**

**Palace Station Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas
October 21, 22 & 23, 2016**



Two Types of Computer Clubs: Retirement Communities

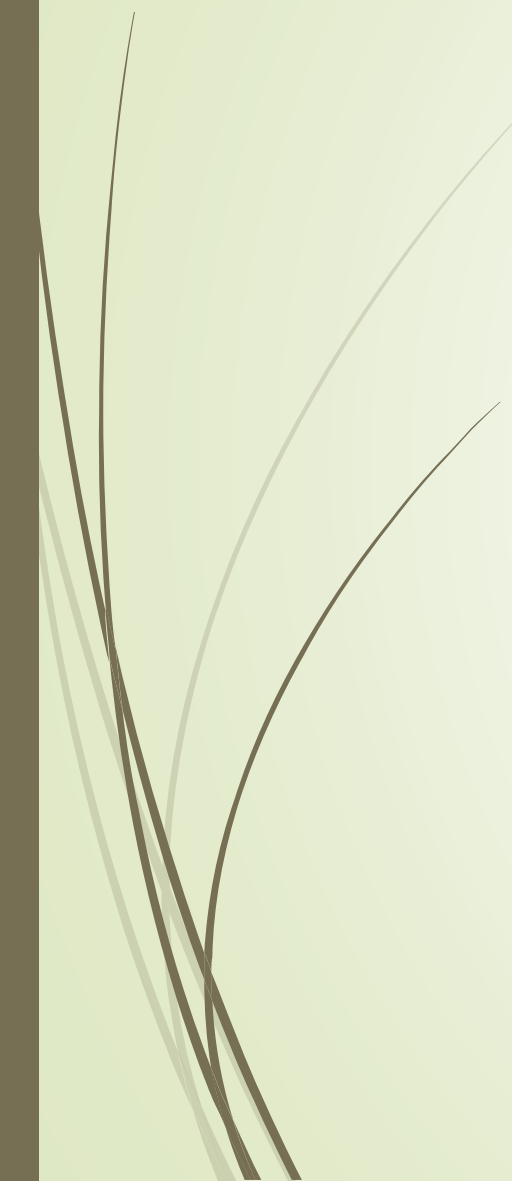
- ▶ Retirement Community Clubs (e.g. Sun City) often use both association dues and membership fees to provide first-class state of the art computer training facilities
 - ▶ As the former Region 9 APCUG Advisor I've toured some of these communities that boast multiple rooms filled with computers running Windows, Apple, and Linux operating systems along with some of the most popular software programs.
 - ▶ Classes are often held daily for beginners as well as more advanced sessions covering the Microsoft Office family of programs.
 - ▶ From a large base of residents there are always individuals willing to step up to facilitate club operations.
- ▶ These clubs flourish and continually look for ways to utilize the variety of benefits offered by APCUG

Two Types of Computer Clubs: Local Area User Groups

- ▶ Computer clubs situated in towns and cities across the nation derive their members from local residents whose interest in technology range from beginners hoping for a positive learning experience to those more experienced looking to stay current with today's constantly changing technologies.
- ▶ Meetings are held in libraries and other public oriented meeting rooms where often the best you can hope for equipment-wise is an internet connection along with some tables and chairs.
- ▶ Typically to retain members the annual dues are minimal.
- ▶ Meetings are usually monthly with members often providing a presentation on a topic of mutual interest.




Two Types of Computer Clubs: Local Area User Groups

- ▶ APCUG membership is important to these clubs since they tend to utilize benefits such as the Speakers Bureau, the Push Newsletter Articles, and the quarterly Virtual Technology Conferences.
 - ▶ With each passing year these type clubs are finding it more difficult to continue for reasons we will now consider.
- 



Local Area Club Case in Point: Payson Area Computer Assn., Payson, AZ

- ▶ Located in the geographic center of the state of Arizona (half way between Phoenix and Flagstaff) at an elevation of 5000 feet, Payson is an active mountain town with four mild seasons and a population of about 15,000, many of whom are retired.
- ▶ The club was started in 1994 when Windows 3.1 was the operating system of choice. Dues are \$15 per year per family.
- ▶ There are two monthly meetings
 - ▶ a general meeting held at the Payson Public Library where a formal presentation is typically held by a club officer or outside vendor.
 - ▶ a “technical” meeting held at a member’s home where discussions of computer trends, and individual member issues can be chatted about, and sometimes worked on.



Payson Area Computer Association: Recent History

- Membership for the last several years has been about 30 with both men and women and almost all over the age of 50 (with many 70+).
 - Attendance at recent meetings) has only been about 10 (non-officer) members, which is lower than typical.
- While members have long been encouraged to bring friends and family to the meetings, this has not transpired as almost all newcomers learn about PACA from the local twice weekly newspaper's "Organizations" listing.
- I have to admit that my encouragement with the students taking my Beginners Class at Gila Community College has resulted in quite a few new members over the years including the last two secretaries.



Issues Facing PACA Today

- ▶ While the club has consistently had over 30 members for each of the last several years, since I've been President from within PACA only the Officers, Webmaster, and Editor have come forward and volunteered to provide presentations.
- ▶ Each November when Elections are being held and no one else is willing to volunteer in the operation of our organization, it is the same folks who agree to continue their role.
 - ▶ I know that privately most of these Officers hope it will only be for one more year.
- ▶ For the coming year we are faced with three out of four officer positions (VP, Secretary, Treasurer) open with no member willing to step up to run for that office.
 - ▶ These three Officers bear no animosity to the club or anyone else; they either work full time or are well into their retirement years and coincidentally have decided at the same time that they need to focus on other activities and interests.



Many Computer Clubs Around the Nation Are Facing These Same Type of Issues

- ▶ To quote an old axiom 80% of the work is typically done by 20% of the people; that 20% number is even less among many computer clubs.
- ▶ Most members in computer club have reached retirement age and perhaps rightfully so feel they have paid their dues and would prefer to concentrate their free time on activities that are important to them.
- ▶ Compared to 20 years ago
 - ▶ today's personal computers are much simpler to use so computer clubs are not as necessary as they once were
 - ▶ most people under 40 years of age have grown up with PCs and take today's technology advancements for granted
 - ▶ personally they don't see the need for computer clubs.



APCUG Membership Declines

- ▶ In 2008 APCUG had 276 member groups.
- ▶ At last count we are down to 172 user groups.
- ▶ From 2011 to now approximately 69 groups have not renewed.
- ▶ Many clubs have become inactive since they are now smaller and don't have the \$50 membership fee, or feel they wouldn't be using our services to warrant the membership cost.
- ▶ As an Advisor, and then Director of APCUG for the last four years I can tell you that each year nationwide 10-20 clubs close down due to not enough individual members volunteering to take an active role, and those left with running the clubs becoming "burned out."
 - ▶ This is true for large more established clubs as well as smaller user groups



What Are the Options for PACA?

- Close down the club at the end of 2016.
 - The Bylaws state any amounts left in our bank account would go to the Payson Library.
 - We would lose our valuable “grandfathered clause” that gives us the use of the Community Room at the library for free each month.
 - Club assets such as the computer projector would need to be sold or donated.
- A Positive Result
 - Two nights a month we can now watch more TV.
- A Negative Result
 - There would no longer be this common thread that brings us all together twice a month for what is typically a pleasurable learning experience.



What Are the Options for PACA?

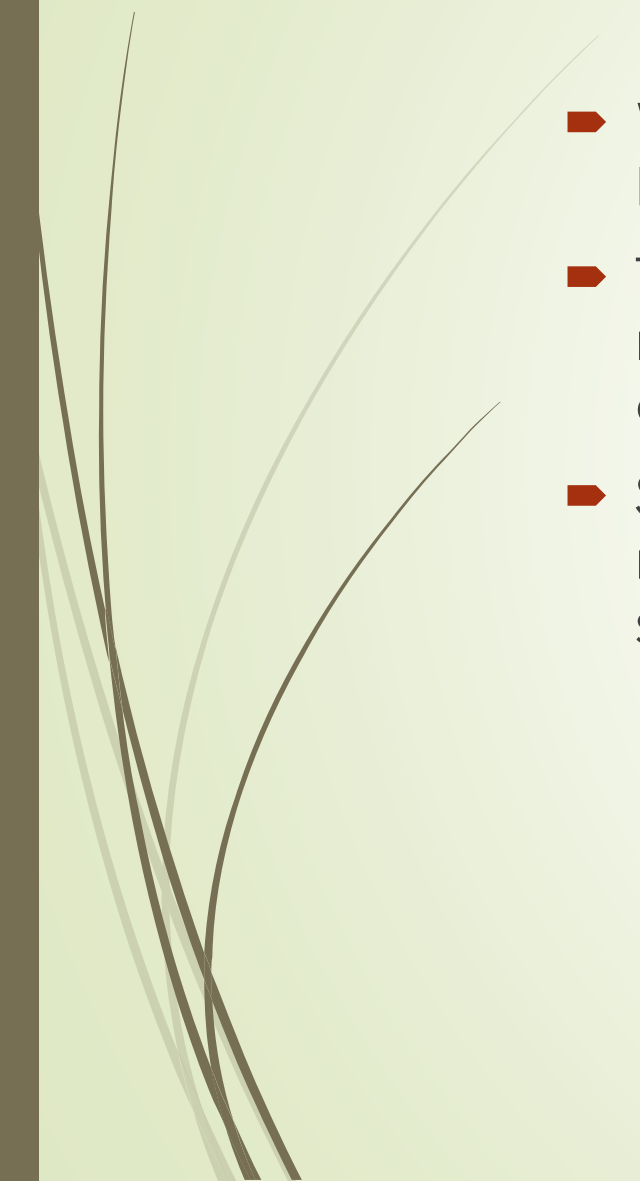
- Convert PACA to a Meet-Up Club
- This is not to be confused with the nationally known Meetup organization
 - Meetup.com is a fee based online social networking portal that facilitates offline group meetings in various large city localities around the world, and allows members to find and join groups unified by a common interest, such as politics, books, games, movies, health, pets, careers or hobbies
- This type of Meetup organization works well for bringing together populations in large cities but does not make sense in a community the size of the Payson area.
- My colleague Bill James, Region 8 Advisor will speak a bit later as how this is working out with his club in Oklahoma City.

How a Payson Meet-Up Would Work

- There would **NOT** be any:
 - officers (only a rotating leader at each monthly meeting to keep things going)
 - members (just attendees); so no membership lists to maintain
 - agendas to prepare each month for the general meeting
 - dues to collect and deposit in the bank account
 - meeting minutes to prepare, approve, and post on the website
 - need to update the website except for special messages
 - need to change the monthly announcement in the local newspaper as it would be static and merely state the day, time, and location of the meet-up
 - Newsletter (which we've already discontinued earlier this year due to non-interest)
 - by-laws spelling out rules and regulations (because there are none)
 - door prizes (no one needs to buy them and be reimbursed)



How a Payson Meet-Up Would Work

- ▶ We would return to just one meeting per month using the Payson Library meeting room
 - ▶ The Technical Meeting would be incorporated into the once a month general meeting so activities such as individual discussions and helping with simple repairs and questions could continue
 - ▶ Since we still have money in the bank, we would continue our membership with APCUG so we could avail ourselves of benefits such as the VTC and guest speakers.
- 

How a Payson Meet-Up Would Work

- Each month there is a Leader
 - This role would rotate and be determined at the previous meeting; the Leader's main purpose is to provide direction during the meeting
 - The meeting would include the following segments:
 - **Show and tell (aka Drag & Brag)** where attendees would bring in new gadgets and demonstrate their operation and explain their purpose
 - **Question and Answer** where attendees could ask computer related questions to the others present, hoping someone has the knowledge to answer such questions
 - **Help Me Mr. Fix-It** where attendees would bring in their equipment and devices they are having problems with to see if other members can provide assistance
 - Attendees (and their invitees) could offer to conduct a **presentation** on a topic of general interest (similar to what PACA officers have arranged in the past but now this will be the responsibility of the attendees)



How a Payson Meet-Up Would Work

- ▶ Depending on activities and interest, meetings could be over in as little as 30 minutes or last up to two hours
- ▶ We would encourage attendees to help expand the focus of the new club and promote involvement with such technology related areas as the Internet of Things, Smartphones, Apple products and Linux systems
 - ▶ Since the library meeting room is large, we envision attendees breaking into several small groups to discuss a topic of interest
- ▶ In order to help grow the new club we strongly encourage attendees to bring with them friends and neighbors, and just help get the word out.
- ▶ An announcement of the new club's direction with either an article in the local newspaper, or just a simple Letter to the Editor



This is a Continuing Story...

- ▶ This suggested change to keep our club going was announced at the October meeting where only about 10 members were present
 - ▶ A copy of the presentation made that night was sent to members so all have a clear understanding of what has been proposed in order to vote at our November meeting on how PACA will proceed
- ▶ My strong inclination is PACA will continue for at least another year in this much less structured manner and if successful, could be a model for other clubs around the country facing similar obstacles to their existence.

End of Presentation Questions?



**APCUG's 2016 International Technology
Conference
Palace Station Hotel and Casino, Las
Vegas
October 21, 22 & 23, 2016**