

# Alternative To Closing a Computer Club



**Ray Baxter**  
**APCUG Director / Treasurer**  
**President, Payson Area Computer Association**



# Two Types of Computer Clubs


## Retirement Community User Groups

- ▶ 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 typically flourish and continually look for ways to utilize the variety of benefits offered by APCUG



# Two Types of Computer Clubs Community Based 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 conference 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 typically monthly with club members, or vendors from the community often providing a presentation on a topic of mutual interest.
- ▶ APCUG membership is important to these clubs since they tend to utilize the benefits we provide such as the Speakers Bureau, the Push Newsletter Articles, and what we are doing here today with our Virtual Technology Conferences.
- ▶ With each passing year these type clubs are finding it more difficult to continue for reasons we will now consider.



# Community Based User Group Case in Point Payson Area Computer Assn., Payson, AZ

- ▶ Located in the geographic center of the state of Arizona (approximately 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 were only \$15 per year per family to encourage broader participation.
- ▶ There were two monthly meetings
  - ▶ a general meeting held at the Payson Public Library where a formal presentation was 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 were chatted about, and sometimes physically 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 60 (with many 70+).
  - ▶ Attendance at the last several meetings in 2016 had only been about 10 (non-officer) members; this was a continuing downward trend experienced during the last few years.
- ▶ 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 town 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.
  - ▶ Amazing what promising a good grade can accomplish.





# Issues Facing PACA in 2016

## (Does the following sound familiar?)

- ▶ While the Payson club has consistently had over 30 members for each of the last several years, actually only a few of the Officers came forward and volunteered to either provide or arrange presentations.
- ▶ Each November when Officer Elections were being held and no one else was willing to volunteer in the operation of our organization, it was the same folks who somewhat reluctantly agreed to continue their role.
  - ▶ I know that privately most of these Officers hoped it would only be for one more year.
- ▶ During the last few years I would personally canvass members who I thought would be good at certain functions but despite my cajoling I had very few takers.



# Issues Facing PACA in 2016

- ▶ Last October for the first time the club was faced with no one willing to run for three out of the four club officer positions (VP, Secretary, Treasurer)
- ▶ These three Officers bore no animosity to the club or anyone else; they either worked full time or were well into their retirement years and purely by coincidence decided almost simultaneously that going forward they wanted to focus their available free time with other activities and interests.
- ▶ No one knew this but as I had been either Vice President or President for the last 10 years my own plan was to announce that 2017 would be my last year as an Officer in the club.

# 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 seems to be even less as it relates to 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
    - ▶ Simply put, they don't see the need for computer clubs.





# APCUG Membership Declines

- ▶ In 2008 APCUG had 276 member groups; for the year 2017 we are down to 157 user groups.
  - ▶ That's 119 user groups or about 13 clubs each year that have not renewed during this period of time
- ▶ Not all have disbanded as some clubs have chosen not to renew since over time they have lost members and now feel their membership level is too small to warrant the \$50 per year dues.
- ▶ Each year nationwide 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 also true for large well-established clubs too. The Houston Area League of PC Users (HAL) started in 1982, and had 6500 members in July 1987; they completely closed in 2014.



# Main Reasons User Groups Close

- ▶ For most of the user groups that have closed in the last several years the main reasons can best be summarized as follows:
  1. Lower attendance
  2. Even lower participation in running the club by its members.
  3. Unable to attract younger members
  4. Downloading free programs from the internet has replaced the need for software related companies to provide free programs on disks to user groups for their members.
  5. The need for a user group to provide computer related information to its members has diminished just as this type of information on the world wide web has expanded

# Two Options for PACA

## ➤ Option 1: 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 each month.
- Club assets such as the computer projector would need to be sold or donated.

## ➤ Option 2: Become a locally based Meet-Up club

- This is not to be confused with the nationally known fee based organization branded as Meet-Up.com which facilitates group meetings in various large cities unified by a common interest.
- This concept works well for bringing together populations in large cities but did not make sense in a community the size of the Payson area.



# How the Payson Meet-Up Works

- ▶ To begin let's mention that **we no longer have:**
  - ▶ officers (only a rotating leader at each monthly meeting to keep things going)
  - ▶ members (just attendees); while there are no formal membership lists to maintain we have someone who volunteered to maintain an email list and send out notices when necessary.
  - ▶ 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
  - ▶ requirements to update the website each month except for special messages



# How the Payson Meet-Up Works

- ▶ To begin let's mention that **we no longer have (con't)**:
  - ▶ requirements to change the monthly announcement in the local newspaper as it is now static providing the day, time, and location of the meet-up
  - ▶ newsletters to prepare
  - ▶ by-laws spelling out the rules and regulations (because there are none)



# How the Payson Meet-Up Works

- ▶ Each month there is a Leader
  - ▶ This role rotates monthly with the Leader's main purpose to provide direction during the meeting
- ▶ The meeting includes the following segments:
  - ▶ **Show and tell** where attendees would bring in new gadgets and demonstrate (aka Show-off) their operation and explain their purpose
  - ▶ **Question and Answer** where attendees ask computer related questions to the others present, hoping someone has the knowledge to provide the needed response
  - ▶ **Help Me Mr. Fix-It** where attendees would bring in equipment and devices they are having problems with to see if others can provide assistance
  - ▶ Attendees (and/or their invitees) are encouraged to provide a **presentation** on a topic of general computer related interest



# How the Payson Meet-Up Works

- ▶ The most important benefits our Meet-Up provides is something a YouTube video cannot offer; I called it the in-person 3D's which include:
  - ▶ Discussion
  - ▶ Dialogue
  - ▶ Demonstrations



# Report Card for 2017

## ► Attendance

- Attendance has increased slightly mainly due to an article I wrote at the beginning of the year for the Payson Roundup newspaper announcing the new club structure.
- The actual attendance number has been between 15 and 22 with the April meeting having more women than men.
- At the April meeting a first-time attendee arrived and said she was new to the community and because of her background in the technology field, wanted to know how she could help the club.
- That had never happened before.





# Report Card for 2017

## ▶ **Leader Role**

- ▶ I was the Leader at the first two (including a previously scheduled Avast presentation by Bob G in January) but after that we've had volunteers with very little "arm twisting."
- ▶ One Leader arranged for a local computer repair facility to send two technicians who spoke for almost an hour on a variety of computer related issues.
- ▶ I believe because there is no formal structure of what the "Leader" has to do or say, individuals who in the past hesitated to speak at our club are no longer tentative.



# Report Card for 2017

## ► Show & Tell

- At the first couple of meetings I was the only one to bring in a new device (e.g. the Amazon Tap and a new hybrid laptop) but at the last meeting an attendee was anxious to show their new “dumb” phone. While his technology was not exciting, this led to a lengthy discussion on cell phones in general and the need and uses of smart phones in particular.

## ► Question & Answer

- We now refer to this as Ask the “Experts” more as a comical reference; nonetheless this has generated discussions on Windows 10, digital photography, the Internet of Things, and more. I have noticed that former members who were hesitant to ask these type questions at the more formal meetings are now very comfortable participants.



# Report Card for 2017

- ▶ **Help Me Mr. Fix It**

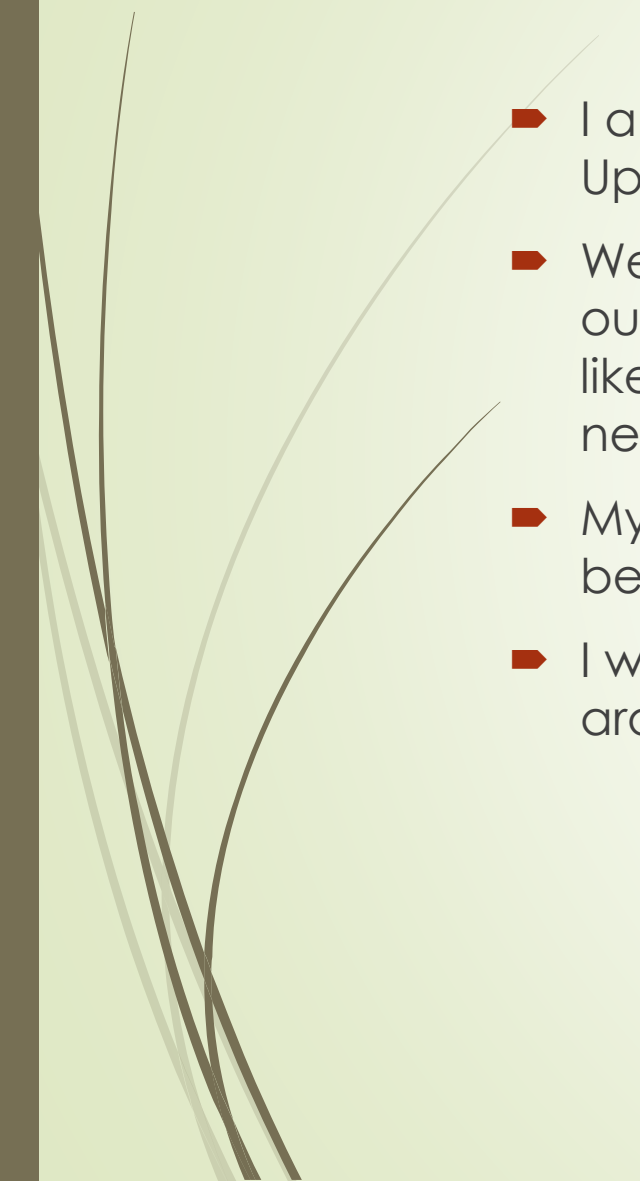
- ▶ While this benefit has not been used yet I do envision attendees bringing in a laptop or other device where there are software issues or just plain “how to use” questions that can be addressed.
- ▶ Our position is most hardware issues that actually require some type of physical repair are best handled by the professionals in our town.

- ▶ **Occasional Presentations**

- ▶ As stated earlier we've had Avast and the Smart Systems technicians speak while I spoke briefly about what to expect from the new Windows 10 Creators Update.



# This is a Continuing Story...

- I am encouraged by these early results and plan to continue with our Meet-Up concept for the remainder of 2017
  - We are fortunate that we have funds in the bank that allow us to continue our APCUG membership because I can see an increased use of services like the Speakers Bureau and Push Articles (without the need for a formal newsletter)
  - My strong inclination is PACA will continue for at least another year and beyond in this much less structured manner.
  - I would be proud if our experiment could become a model for other clubs around the country facing similar obstacles to utilize.
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# Questions

**“Alternative To Closing a Computer Club”**

**Ray Baxter, Payson Area Computer Assn.**

**[rbaxter@apcug.org](mailto:rbaxter@apcug.org)**

