



SAN FRANCISCO PERSONAL COMPUTER *eBLUE*
USERS GROUP *NOTES*

Volume 22 Nos. 10 - 12

October - December 2003



Who We Are, What We Do and How You Can Join the Fun!

The San Francisco PC Users Group, founded in 1982, serves as a regional volunteer forum for the exchange of ideas, industry insights and solutions to problems, etc. related to using personal computers having the Intel x86 or compatible processor.

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Annual membership in The San Francisco PC Users Group includes, among other benefits, monthly meetings, a one year subscription to *Blue Notes*, and Internet access. Cost: \$25 for individuals, \$30 for families and \$50 for businesses. E-mail our Membership Registrar, membership@mail.sfpcug.org, or attend a monthly meeting (see details inside and calendar). An application form can be found on the last page of this issue. Once completed, mail it with your payment to the SFPCUG Membership Director, 3145 Geary Blvd., Box 284, San Francisco, CA 94118-3300

Internet Services for All Members

Internet access is a major incentive for SFPCUG membership. Visit our web site: <http://www.sfpcug.org> where you will find, information about *Blue Notes*, the club's dial-up Internet services, activities of our various Special Interest Groups. etc. PPP accounts are available - e-mail: help@mail.sfpcug.org or contact our WebMaster at webmaster@mail.sfpcug.org or 415-665-3599.

The Internet SIG offers access to a shared account for experimenting with Web technology, including CGI scripting. Contact the WebMaster for details.

Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

Users gather in SIGs to explore and solve specific problems related to software and/or hardware. The Calendar will list dates and venues. If a SIG addressing your interest(s) does not exist, call 415-665-3599 or 415-346-2644 to organize one.

Write a Review on New Software and it's Yours, Free!!

Vendors frequently offer new software or books to the SFPCUG so that an interested member can give it a test run and keep the product in exchange for a published review in *Blue Notes*. Our Product Review Coordinator can arrange to obtain software you want to review. Guidelines for reviews appear regularly in *Blue Notes*, or ask the Product Review Coordinator for a copy.

Steering Committee Meetings

The SFPCUG Steering Committee Meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at the upstairs meeting room of Round Table Pizza on Geary Blvd. and 16th Ave.

The SFPCUG Steering Committee discusses issues of immediate importance to the Group and makes plans for future activities. Steering Committee meetings are open to all SFPCUG members. Any Group member having attended two of four preceding Steering Committee meetings is eligible to vote.

General meetings

General meetings are held on the 3rd Tuesday of each month. Doors open at 6:15 PM for SIGs and the general meeting begins at 7PM and end by 9PM

First time guests are admitted free, repeat guests are asked for a donation of \$4.

Location: Meetings now take place in the auditorium of the Community College District Office, 33 Gough Street, (a half-block south of Market Street) San Francisco, CA There is ample free parking in front of the building. Civic Center BART and MUNI is ½ a block away.

The latest information on programs and location for upcoming general and steering committee meetings is available on our web site <http://www.sfpcug.org>. Always check for late breaking news.

Publication in Blue Notes

Follow the structure of a previous article in *Blue Notes*.

- * **Name/version of the subject program/book.** What does the program do and on what operating platform (s)? Does it satisfactorily fill a genuine need, e.g. task, entertainment, utility, etc.?
 - * **Reviewer:** name and email address.
Name and reputation of the company distributing the product. Available mail address and phone number(s)
 - * **At A Glance:** A 1-to 4 rating (worst to best)
 - * **Price:** MSRP, retail or street
 - * **System Requirements:** (self-explanatory)
 - * **Pros:** Ease of use, learning, etc? Documentation: comprehensive, intelligible? Support? Does it deliver as advertised? If a book, is the author's style smooth or challenging? Is the Index useful?
 - * **Cons:** Shortfalls, if any
 - * The body of your review
 - * Graphics welcome and requested if possible
- When addressing technical, complex issues, endeavor to be as comprehensive and street-level clear as possible.**
- * Use one space between sentences, two carriage returns at the end of each paragraph
 - * Re-read your work carefully, objectively, checking word, sentence and logic flow to ensure you say precisely what you mean to say, clearly
 - * Do not use indents or tabs
 - * Spell-check your work

Procedure for submitting articles for publication.

Save your article as a pure ASCII file with line breaks, and a **.TXT** extension. You may alternately save your files in Rich Text Format (**.RTF** extension) then send them to bluenotes@mail.sfpcug.org. Should special formatting be necessary, forward a hard copy to the Editor. Contact *Blue Notes* staff by e-mail, bluenotes@mail.sfpcug.org.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

President's Message	4
From The DealsGuy for	
December 2003	6
January 2004	9
Steering Committee Meeting Minutes	
September, 2003	12
No Meeting in October, 2003	12
November, 2003	13
SFpcUG - Who's Who	14
Application/Renewal/Address Change	15

President's message

Less Is More

The bane of computer user groups, the death of modern society, the end of the world: FREE STUFF. “Go ahead, make my day.” As a computer repair guy, I just love all the free junk and the paid-for junk that people load on their computers. Keeps me in business.

For most of my computing life I said that computers are just like women: “Just say yes” and all parties to the relationship will be happy. No more. Say “yes” to the myriad of come-on’s, atomic clocks, weather vanes, games, portals to salacious offers, and all the rest, and you’ll have spyware infesting your computer faster than you can dial my number. What’s worse, if anything can be, installation of certain third-party software – such as utilities from a big-name vendor that are supposed to help keep your computer free of problems – and pretty soon you’ll learn you’ve got a real problem and have to call in the experts, who will promptly uninstall all these “helpful” programs in an attempt to get your machine back up to speed. And I do mean “speed” literally, as one consequence of too

many programs running in the background is that they slowly grind the computer down to a halt.

Basic rule: if you don’t need the program, don’t install it. If you do need it for one event or a brief period, install the program and then uninstall it when you’re finished. If it loads in your system tray, consider removing it from your Startup folder and start the program manually when needed. If you use some program such as AOL that offers a half-dozen or more ancillary programs, don’t install any you don’t expect to use. By the way, one good reason to use Windows XP is that it does a better job of uninstalling programs than any of the 9X platforms. Another nice XP feature, hit Ctrl-Alt-Del keys and then the Performance tab. Check out your “peak” and “limit” usage at the bottom left – to get an idea how your memory is being used. Odds are that your “peak” (actual use) is less than your “limit”. Put another way, you may have a lot more memory than you need or use.

John Scott, now living in Hawaii and we’ll miss his neighborly counsel, likes SpyBot as his favorite spyware removal program. Others like Lavasoft’s Ad-aware. Both are free and I use both, plus recently I found NoAdware to be useful, though I didn’t register for fear of hidden repercussions. One friend has to run at least two of these weekly to keep the cooties off his machine. Perhaps he visits sites that are more contagious than the New York Times, but I think the real

problem is that just about every site is now loaded with pop-ups and other enticements, some of which inform the user that there is spyware on his or her machine and **CLICK HERE** to download free software to remove it. Guess what. The free software is more than likely spyware itself. ***New rule of living in the computer world:*** go to Google and type in anything you're unsure about – a few minutes research can save you big bucks and a lot of time and misery.

What is absolutely necessary? An up-to-date antivirus program, and if you have broadband, a firewall. Of course you'll want all the games and regular software that you use often, and a few that perhaps you don't use all that often but that are components of a suite. Perhaps, for example, you don't use PowerPoint that much, but have it installed as part of Microsoft Office. Another necessary item is all "critical updates" that Microsoft makes available, and a good many of the "recommended updates" from Microsoft. For example, DirectX 9.0a is integral to many computing tasks, so to have the latest version makes sense.

See URL <http://www.beyond3d.com/articles/directxnext/>

Outlook Express 6 and Windows Media Player 9 are probably stronger than their predecessors.

While the latest-and-greatest makes general sense, some of the bells-and-whistles do not. Every company now wants to tie

you to their player or program if they can, plus perhaps get you to try some **FREE STUFF** for 14-days, etc., if you'll be so kind and bite. RealOne, for example, should be installed manually, taking care to de-select the offered file associations and useless icons they want on your desktop. RealOne is great for .RA and .RM files, and perhaps others, but you don't have to let it take over your .MP3s and others that are "associated" with another program of your choice – perhaps Microsoft's Windows Media Player. In general, install all software "manually" and take care to read the screens to make sure you're getting what you want, not what they want to put on your computer. All corporations are all merciless capitalist pigs on this issue.

Different Theme – New Club Name

Our group has been the San Francisco PC Users Group for over 20 years. At the last APCUG (Association of PC Users Groups) meeting in Las Vegas, at COMDEX 2003, a major theme for users groups was to learn to "think outside of the box". This cliché aside, there is a distinct "graying" of UG members along with a significant change in the computer world. The new "computers" are getting smaller and often look more like cell phones or PDAs than computers. There's a computer in dozens of household appliances today, and more coming – this "convergence" was a major theme of Intel's presentation to APCUG. Home entertainment is not only going "digital", but is being controlled by computers that are

gussied-up PCs. High-definition TV is here and most of us don't know what it is. There are digital cameras, TV recording devices, MP3 players that hold 30 gigabytes, a replacement for DVD already, and a host of new gismos and equipment on the way. In short, our group may well be served better by a slightly or very different name and focus – to reflect the new digital era we're in. Various suggestions have been made, including San Francisco de Users Group, for Digital Electronics. One immediate problem, however, is that “de” means “of” in Spanish, which would confuse the matter. Another suggestion is San Francisco Digitronics Society (or Community) SFDS. A new name is not imperative but perhaps makes sense. Let us know what you think.

To all of you, a happy holiday season.

Butler Crittenden, President
San Francisco PC Users Group

From The DealsGuy for December, 2003

by Bob Click
of Greater Orlando Computer Users Group

I've been so busy between our two-week cruise and working some interesting trade shows (to pay for the cruise) this month that I hope my readers can live with some bits and pieces held back for future columns.

***Who Would Have Thought:**

For what its worth, I recently read that three people refueling their vehicles are reported to have been seriously burned as a result of their cell phone which was in their pocket or hanging on their belt. Seems it rang while they were fueling the gas tank and ignited the fumes. Two had very serious burns on their lower body as a result. Does that mean that we should beware of that unanswered call from our spouse on the way home from work if you turn off your phone? Maybe, but I recommend that only if we are pumping gas. You can always return the call later if you might be in trouble, and refer her to my column.

***Just Some Comments**

On the cruise, the ship (Summit) had a nice Cyber Café. Their computers all used LCD monitors. The price for using a computer was fifty cents per minute. When you are a captive audience there are no choices, but I didn't think that was bad under the circumstances. All you had to do was run your stateroom card through a slot and start typing, FAST. I didn't make use of it so when I got home it took me almost a day to go through all my e-mail, reading it and cleaning out all the spam. It was a disgusting job with so much spam.

***Who's next?**

I read that Symantec is buying PowerQuest Corp. for \$150 million and should complete the purchase by the end of the year. I'm not sure if it will affect user groups, but as you know, Symantec dropped user group support a few years ago and PowerQuest cut the financial support they were giving Gene and Linda Barlow last year. It is, however, a fact that PowerQuest is more than pleased with the job that User Group Relations (Gene's Company) still does for them and I doubt they will want to lose that kind of product support. In the meantime, if you are thinking of purchasing a PowerQuest product, I wouldn't wait long to go to [<http://www.ugr.com>] and take advantage of the low UG prices, just in case. Who knows, with such a great track record, perhaps Gene will also be selling Symantec products. Makes sense to me!

***A Show I Love To Hate**

I was working a Direct Marketing Assoc. trade show for a few days and had a chance to browse some of the booths. I doubt I need to explain who participates. While they were very much in a minority, I did come across a booth selling a few million email addresses for marketing. The interesting part was the product's package, which was a can that looked exactly like a can of the famous Spam. I wonder if Hormel knows about this. There were also CD Duplicators, automated mailing equipment, automatic dialing equipment and other interesting booths. I must say that I really had to bite my tongue when I talked to a few of those booths that make their money inconveniencing us. On the other hand, I found some nice give-a-ways there, such as clocks, calculators, stuffed animals and other great items.

It was interesting talking to a salesman in one booth for a company that has print shops and distribution centers all over the country where they print many of the advertising flyers we all find in our newspapers. He talked about how they transfer all the data by wire and computers handle much of the production.

***Correction**

Last month I talked about flag screensavers at [<http://www.improbable.ukgateway.net/flag3d/flag3d.htm>], but Paul Witheridge e-mailed me that I wrongly described the site offering Canadian flag screensavers. Here is the correction I received: “Bob, there was only ONE Canadian flag and a good selection of others including US, UK and Australia but the BIG bonus is that it will make a flag out of any BMP you add to the folder! Too bad you misinformed your readers and a lot of non-Canadians will miss out on a good screen saver thinking that it's Canadian only.” Sorry for that mistake folks, and I thank Paul for the correction.

***Still Good**

I'm pretty sure that great Serif offer of free software and mouse for just the cost of shipping is still good. Call 1-800-55-SERIF to order. The various free programs are actually on just one CD ROM. The negative side is that now they often send you special offers for all kinds of products.

***Enough Of Those Darn CC Offers**

Most homes get an average of at least five credit card offers a month and I think I get that many in less than a week. You notice they are all “Preapproved” too, although I doubt they actually check to see if you are credit-worthy, but I sure get sick of them. With the National Do-Not-Call list lurking in the

wings (on again, off again twice), the Post Office is offering better discounts to the issuers of major credit cards. Everybody knows that Internet use is hurting the Post Office's mail volume. I read that you can call 1-888-567-8688 and opt out of those preapproved offers by mail now. I get about two a day lately, often from the same people, in different type envelopes.

***More On Long Distance Deals**

I previously wrote about cheap ways for long distance calling. Since then, I read about [<http://www.onesuite.com>] offering 2.9 cents per minute if you use their 800 number. They also have many local access numbers whereby you would get the service for 2.5 cents per minute if there is one in your city. When I looked, there was none in Orlando, but they are in many other cities.

Gerry Wooldridge of Boeing Employees Computing Society e-mailed that she uses the long distance service offered by Costco Wholesale, which has stores all over the country. It is TTI National and is billed separately so no extra charges are incurred on your phone bill. I don't have the details since I am not a member, but Gerry is well satisfied with the service and there are Costco membership stores all over the country to check on it.

If you have a lot of incoming calls from your own family, such as college students, some providers offer an optional 800

number to call home (I need money Dad). Recommended is Enhanced Communications Group (1-800-254-4060). Check out [<http://www.saveonphone.com>] who made that recommendation.

From The DealsGuy for January, 2004

**by Bob Click
of Greater Orlando Computer Users Group**

Last month (December 2003) I included a warning about people being burned by cell phones causing fires while they were refueling their vehicles. Ira Wilsker, who has a weekly radio show, and is on the APCUG BODA, quickly informed me that it was a hoax, so I sent out a retraction. While it may never have happened, I'm not so sure that it couldn't happen. Its true that mechanical relays and switches have long ago disappeared from such electronic devices, and even when it rings, it is done with electronic pulses, all completely sealed in the circuit.

On the other hand, antennas are often loose and I know a friend who had a battery explode (not near a gas pump). Not

only that but how many of you have dropped your cell phones. That could crack a board, or a lead from a component, thereby causing a temporary contact that could possibly cause a spark. All this not to mention static electricity from your body (from your seat or otherwise) when you touched any electronic device, the vehicle, or the pump. Check this URL sent to me by Joseph de Leon, editor for PC Alamode [<http://www.esdjournal.com/index.htm>]. For that reason, I believe you should not have any active electronic devices in your possession when refueling your vehicle. They have even talked about the possibility of grounding straps when refueling on the news recently. The above simply illustrates that however wild the scenario, an explosion is possible and you can't be too careful. Maybe the new hydrogen powered cars will be safer.

***Fight Fire With Fire**

I was surprised at the amount of feedback I received from my item about stopping the receipt of credit card solicitations. A lot of people already fight back in a variety of ways. Many just use the application and the envelope with return postage to write a nasty or informative message to the sender, such as please stop these &*%#& mailings, or "party deceased so don't send 'me' any more." Some get a bit sadistic such as wrapping a stone or brick and taping the postage paid envelope to it to send them. I liked those people's idea. However, I'll

settle for simply calling 888-567-8688 to try stopping it since that is supposed to stop all the companies from sending them. You would have enjoyed the messages I received.

***They're The Losers**

Two vendors who promised deals have not delivered yet so I have put together a few things that I have in reserve. You'd think those vendors would love the chance to get this much exposure (about 60,000 readers) at NO expense, but that's the way it often turns out, and one vendor had little response from their last offer.

***A Browser That Works Good**

I've been meaning to write about Mozilla for a while, but never got around to it. However, it is becoming more popular and I see more and more written about Mozilla, in fact I even have a review for it on my Web page. It is not quite as full featured as the IE and Netscape, but it does some things those do not. Best of all, its free so what do you have to lose. It's also said to be faster since the code is lean and mean. It is skinable and it kills all those popups.

A few Web pages may not view as good, but I'm told there is a lot to like about Mozilla. Get it at:

[<http://www.cnet.com/software/0-3227884-8-20005816-2.html?tag=st.sw.3227884-8-20005816-1.arrow3227884-8-20005816-2>] where there is also a review.

***Wow --- Calls All Over For FREE**

I read that you can make telephone calls all over the world via this Web site. [<http://www.pulver.com/fwd/>] Take a look and see if it will fit in with what you might be looking for. My thanks to Hewie Poplock of Central Florida Computer Society for writing about this one in "Hewie's favorites." I don't know anybody who has tried this one so you are on your own. I was also advised that you should read the offer thoroughly since it is not for everybody.

***Affordable Legal Help**

Last winter I wrote about the free tax help for AARP members at tax time and its almost tax time again. I was since reminded that AARP members have other benefits as well. An important one is in the form of legal help. For example, should you decide to move to another state, it is good advice to have a new "last will and testament" drafted that conforms to the new state's laws. That might normally cost you anywhere from \$200 to \$400, but getting an attorney through the AARP Legal Services Network (LSN) can save you money. I have no idea what all the services are that they cover, but check it out at [<http://www.aarp.org/lbn>] or call 1-800-424-3410. Remember this is for AARP members only.

***What's In Your House?**

Let's face it, if you had a serious fire and disastrous loss of personal items, can you sit down and list everything in your house for the insurance adjuster? I doubt you can. Many of us talk about making up a personal inventory, but just never get around to it, but in case you do take the time to do it, here is a great software called "My Stuff 1.5" for doing the job. It is available at:

<http://www.contactplus.com/products/freestuff/mystuff.htm> and its a freebie. The download is 4 MB. You can even see "page previews" there so you can get a good look at it. Even so, at no cost, just go ahead and download it and give it a try. No loss except your time if you don't like it. My thanks to Jerry Wonderly of Dayton Microcomputer Assoc. for finding this for their members. My brother-in-law had a disastrous fire in his home many years ago and was thinking of items for months afterwards, but it was too late because he had already settled. Do yourself a favor and get this done, but don't store the record in your own house. Guess why!

This column is written to make user group members aware of special offers or freebies I have found or arranged, and my comments should not be interpreted to encourage, or discourage, the purchase of any products, no matter how enthused I might sound. Bob (The Cheapskate) Click [Bobclick@mindspring.com]. Visit my Web site at <http://www.dealsguy.com>] for past columns and many interesting articles I have taken from various users group newsletters.

MINUTES

SEPTEMBER MINUTES

The San Francisco PC Users Group Steering Committee meeting of September 2, 2003, was held at Round Table Pizza. **Present:** Butler Crittenden, Judy Gaer, Ed Fok, Harold Charns, David Ross, Pierre Hahn and David Caldwell. The meeting was called to order at 19:03 hours, chaired by club president Butler Crittenden. The **Minutes** of the August meeting were reviewed and approved with one abstention.

Treasurer's Report: Financial report was distributed and approved. Our balance remains healthy. The treasurer has not yet had a chance to change bank accounts but he will as soon as he has time.

President's Report: He has finished his Blue Notes Column. He reiterated that we need to find "new blood" to replace the too-long-serving officers (especially the secretary).

Vice-President's Report: Don Oclassen was absent with leave, traveling abroad.

Webmaster's Report: The webmaster was not present. Butler will send an email to Joseph re cutting out two of the three phone lines and to advise him that SFpcUG's serving as an ISP will be discontinued as soon as a web-hosting service is obtained. The consensus is that the club will make these changes by January 1, 2004.

Membership Committee: There were two renewals.

Blue Notes Editor's Report: The new issue is ready for publication in the next few days. Pierre asked that the President or secretary email him the last few months of minutes.

Product Review: No change.

Program Chair report: September, Learn iT! will host the club at their headquarters in the business district. Microsoft will present in October or November and will notify us soon.

Old Business: Having members get items at office stores for free after rebate for giveaway items was again discussed. To do so was agreed

upon but no specific volunteer has agreed to do this.

New Business: David Caldwell will let City College know that we won't be there in September and will confirm the Christmas party date and time with them.

A motion was made and seconded that the meeting be adjourned. All agreed and the meeting was adjourned at 19:41 hours.

Respectfully submitted,
Judy Gaer, Secretary

OCTOBER MINUTES

No meeting was held

NOVEMBER MINUTES

The San Francisco PC Users Group Steering Committee meeting of November 4, 2003, was held at Round Table Pizza.

Present: Butler Crittenden, Judy Gaer, Edlenn Fok, Harold Charns, David Ross, Don Oclassen and David Caldwell. The meeting was called to order at 19:03 hours, chaired by club president Butler Crittenden. The **Minutes** of the September meeting were not available, so it was decided that they would be approved via email, which was done by November 7, 2003.

Treasurers Report: Financial report was distributed and approved. Our balance remains healthy. The treasurer asked whether we wanted to continue using the same size box at Mail Boxes Etc. for our mail. Everyone at the meeting agreed that keeping the same address and box number was important, so he will renew it for the next year. Harold is ready to open the USBank account. It has free small business checking with 75 free transactions per month. Those authorized to sign checks are Butler Crittenden, Harold Charns, and Edlenn Fok, who will meet November 12 at USBank to sign signature cards.

President's Report: He is tired. He is starting to solicit donors for the auction and requested that members of the steering committee help with this by sending out some of the emails and following up on those they send. Several present agreed to help.

Vice-President's Report: Don is back.

Webmaster's Report: The webmaster was not present. The club's web site and email have been spammed out of existence; Butler will find a site to host us ASAP. He will check with APCUG first to see what site they recommend. He will also email the current users of our ISP that we will no longer provide this service. Ed suggested we solicit volunteers to help set up the web site.

Membership Committee: There were eight memberships in September, all renewals and two renewal memberships in October.

Blue Notes Editor's Report: Pierre was out of the country.

Product Review: No change.

Program Chair report: An online backup system is scheduled for presenting in November, but Butler has not heard from them recently with a definite yes. He will look

into the possibility of a "presenter in a box" if they are not coming.

Old Business: Having members get items at office stores for free-after-rebate giveaway items was again discussed. Ed Fok was authorized to do this and let the treasurer know the cost. The club will front the money and be paid back when the rebates arrive. David Caldwell handed out a copy of a letter that he faxed to City College requesting the room for the meeting for next year.

New Business: The treasurer mentioned he will be having surgery and will be unavailable for six weeks starting 11/24. All wished him well with his surgery.

A motion was made and seconded that the meeting be adjourned. All agreed and the meeting was adjourned at 19:58 hours.

**Respectfully submitted,
Judy Gaer, Secretary**

PRESIDENT

Butler Crittenden

president@mail.sfpcug.org

415-346-9321

PRODUCT REVIEW COORDINATOR

Carol Lee

Productreview@mail.sfpcug.org**VICE-PRESIDENT**

Donald Oclassen

vice-president@mail.sfpcug.org*Blue Notes -*bluenotes@mail.sfpcug.org**SECRETARY**

Judy Gaer

secretary@mail.sfpcug.org**Co-Editors**

Pierre M. Hahn

415-474-1587

Tom McLoughlin

510-654-4027

TREASURER

Harold Charns

treasurer@mail.sfpcug.org

415-861-6043

Blue Notes FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Tom Karnes

415-431-0241

Assistant TREASURER

David Caldwell

treasurer@mail.sfpcug.org

415-777-1935

MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR

Joseph Puig

415-564-7730

WEBMASTER

Joseph Puig

WebMaster@mail.sfpcug.org

415-564-7730

24 hour recording for meeting information 415-346-2644

San Francisco PC Users Group
Application/Renewal/Address Change

Name: _____
(Please type or print legibly.)

Date: _____

Address: _____

Home phone: (____) _____

Work phone: (____) _____

City, State, Zip: _____

FAX phone: (____) _____

E-Mail Address: _____

Please check: __ Renewal member # _____ __ New Member

Check type of membership:

- Individual \$25
- Family \$30
- Business \$50
- Outside US \$25

please send your check to:

SF PC Users Group
Attn: Membership Director
3145 Geary Blvd, Box 284
San Francisco, CA 94118-3300

Please be patient it may take up to 3 weeks to enable the account

Amount enclosed: \$ _____ (Please do not mail cash.)