

Chico Enterprise-Record (Chico, CA)
January 26, 2009

Yes, some things really are FREE

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Section: Local3

"Free" is a dubious word and inspires suspicion in the hearts of those who have seen too many scams and know better than to trust it.

The skepticism is well-earned with fine print that can sometimes be rather pricey. But some things really are free. Online and locally, people can find some "freebies" with no strings attached.

Local Freecycle network

The Freecycle Network allows members to give away unneeded items or ask for needed items from others in the community. All for free. Chico, Oroville and Paradise all have their own Freecycle groups and Web sites with over 30,000 members combined.

Chico resident Jolene Morgan moderates the Chico and Paradise sites and has been a member for about four years.

"The main purpose of Freecycle is to keep things from going to the landfill," she said. "There's no need for it because they can totally be reused."

It's mostly household items that given away on the site. Morgan has received many items including TVs, fish tanks, recliners and appliances.

Her suggestions for posting is to specify in the headline whether it is a need or an offer and what the item is. She also suggests putting all needs or offers into one post. The group can e-mail a user every reply, but it might be better to turn off e-mails and just check the site or get a daily digest e-mail.

Computer help

For those who have computer problems or are intimidated by them, Ray Norman of Chico offers free help. He is a retired consultant and now regularly visits people's homes to help fix computers or pick out new equipment.

"It's essential that people know there's hope," he said. "It doesn't have to cost hundreds of dollars."

Norman and his wife Trish will go within 50 miles of Chico to help. He decided to offer the service because seniors and disabled people are often taken advantage of, he said.

Norman can be reached at 809-0298 or recyclingray@aol.com.

Free boxing class

A "Never Get Hit" program at Chico Boxing for Fitness offers a free boxing class for women every Saturday from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. All gear is available there and the class takes trainees through various exercises and moves.

Luis Rodriguez, owner of the gym, started the classes to attract more women to boxing and to teach them self-defense.

"It's a better workout than kickboxing," Rodriguez said, because of the variety of the workout, including calisthenics, medicine ball work outs, punching bag exercises and jump rope exercises.

Chico Boxing for Fitness is located at 707 Wall St. in Chico and can be reached at 343-0952.

Legal assistance and advice

The Community Legal Information Center run through Chico State University offers free legal information to everyone in the community and surrounding areas. Contact the center at 898-4354.

There are also free services specifically for seniors offered by Passages for Chico, Oroville, Paradise and Orland. Residents can make appointments by calling 898-5923 or toll free at [1-800-822-0109](tel:1-800-822-0109) for English or [1-800-345-9491](tel:1-800-345-9491) for Spanish.

Bus rides

Butte County Regional Transit offers free rides to Chico State University students, residents who work in downtown Chico, children under 6 and city employees. Chico State Associated Students pays for bus rides and students just have to slide their Wildcat ID card. Downtown and city workers can go into the Chico Finance Office with proof of employment, like a pay stub, to get a free B-Line annual pass. For more information, contact the Finance Office at 879-7300 or 411 Main St.

Food and clothing

For basic necessities in Magalia and Stirling City, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Magalia offers free food and clothing to the needy from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursdays at 15204 Skyway. Call 873-2513 for information.

Chico Craigslist

The "Free" and "Barter" categories have much to offer and there is often useful items up for grabs for the first person to take it. Animals, couches, electronics, appliances and many more items are put up. Some of them are strange but many are the usual yard sale quality finds. For safety reasons, bringing along a friend to help pick up an item or meeting in a public place is best.

Skype

This free Web service allows users to make free calls to anywhere in the world over the Internet to others with Skype. Across the country or across the globe, talking from computer to computer is absolutely free using this service. Users must install the Skype program and have a microphone for their computer, although some laptops and computers have built-in microphones. The service also calls landlines and charges a minimal fee for it, depending on where the user is calling.

Credit Reports

The Fair Credit Reporting Act was created to ensure every U.S. resident can review their credit report to prevent fraud and identity theft. Residents are allowed one free credit report from each of the three credit agencies per year. The report can be filed at AnnualCreditReport.com, by calling [1-877-322-8228](tel:1-877-322-8228) or printing off the form from the Federal Trade Commission and mailing it in. Completing the forms online is relatively simple but to keep it free, people should avoid agreeing to pay for other services. The only downside to the report? This does not include a credit score, just a report of activity.

The also warns consumers of imposter sites. Users should be sure to type the address correctly. If something is amiss on a person's report, AnnualCreditReport.com has suggestions on how to remove errors.

Craft patterns

There are hundreds of sites where crafters can receive free patterns for knit, crochet, sewing, embroidery and nearly every other craft imaginable.

- Craft: magazine blog
- Make: magazine blog
- Lion Brand Yarn — crochet and knit patterns
- Burda Style — sewing
- Crochet Me* Knitty.com

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Record Number: 11553279