

## FREE Bill Pay Service

If you haven't experienced the convenience and safety paying your bills online has to offer, what are you waiting for? Plus4 is now offering Bill Pay service free of charge. Bill Pay coupled with Online Banking is a convenient way to access and manage your accounts, all in one place! Paying your bills, setting up email alerts to alert you when your account falls below a minimum balance, printing copies of your cleared checks and making loan payments are just a few things you can do with Plus4's Online Banking. Log on today...

[www.plus4cu.org](http://www.plus4cu.org)



## Sign Up For Direct Deposit

*US Treasury urges Social Security check recipients to sign up for direct deposit*

The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Go Direct campaign urges Social Security check recipients who live along the Gulf and Eastern seaboard to switch to direct deposit. The recommendation, offered in light of last year's devastating hurricanes, is aimed at ensuring citizens receive their federal benefits without disruption.

Across the United States, about 12 million people continue to receive their federal benefit payments by paper check - putting them at risk in the event of a natural disaster or a major life change.

In those critical days following Hurricane Katrina, the Treasury worked with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to get displaced Social Security and SSI recipients their payments as quickly as possible. But those who already were using direct deposit had immediate access to their funds from virtually anywhere, thanks to automated teller machines and financial institution networks. For Americans who receive Social Security, SSI and other federal benefits, direct deposit is simply the best way to get payments. Direct deposit is completely pre-

dictable and allows access to funds wherever people may be staying. That means people don't have to wait for a check to arrive, or worry if they can't be home - for whatever reason - when it does.

Just as important, direct deposit eliminates the risk of stolen checks and forgeries and helps protect people from identity theft. Fraud and identity theft are growing concerns for all Americans, including those who receive federal benefits. In fact, a report released in January 2006 by the Federal Trade Commission shows significant increases in fraud (47 percent more) and identity theft (21 percent more) complaints reported by consumers from 2003 - 2005.

For all these reasons, the Treasury is urging Social Security and SSI check recipients in hurricane zones to sign up for direct deposit. It's easy to sign up for direct deposit and only takes a few minutes. Call the Go Direct help line at (800) 333-1795, sign up online at [www.godirect.org](http://www.godirect.org), or visit Plus4 Credit Union, we have the forms you need to fill out for direct deposit.

## Plus4 Locations

Web  
[www.plus4cu.org](http://www.plus4cu.org)

Phone Numbers  
Member Services  
(713) 970-6200

Toll-Free  
800-621-6752

24-Hour Teller & Loan by Phone  
(713) 970-6200 option 5

### Branch Locations

**Almeda Genoa Office**  
9998 Almeda Genoa Rd.  
Houston, TX 77075

Lobby Hours:  
Mon-Fri: 9 am - 5 pm  
Sat: 9 am - 2 pm

Drive Through Hours:  
Mon-Fri: 7 am - 7 pm  
Sat: 7 am - 2 pm

**Downtown Office**  
401 Franklin  
Houston, TX 77201

Lobby Hours:  
Mon-Thurs: 7 am - 3 pm  
Fri: 7 am - 4 pm

**Long Drive Office**  
6055 S. Loop East  
Houston, TX 77087

Lobby Hours:  
Mon-Thurs: 9 am - 5 pm  
Fri: 9 am - 6 pm

Drive Through Hours:  
Mon-Thurs: 8 am - 5 pm  
Fri: 7 am - 6 pm  
Sat: 9 am - 1 pm

**North Houston Office**  
4600 Aldine Bender Rd. Rm 239  
Houston, TX 77032

Lobby Hours:  
Mon-Thurs: 7 am - 3 pm  
Fri: 7 am - 4 pm

**Credit Union Service Centers**  
Learn where Credit Union Service Centers are in Houston by visiting [www.creditionet.net](http://www.creditionet.net).

### Board of Directors

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## What's happening around town:

Plus4's Home Buying Seminar  
Sept 9th - 10am  
Almeda Genoa Branch  
English & Spanish

TX Renaissance Festival  
Sept 30th - Nov 19th  
Plantersville, TX  
[www.texrenfest.com](http://www.texrenfest.com)

Bayou City Art Festival  
Oct 14th - Oct 15th  
Downtown Houston  
[www.bayoucityartfestival.com](http://www.bayoucityartfestival.com)

Wings Over Houston Air Show  
Oct 21st - Oct 22nd  
Ellington Field  
[www.wingsoverhouston.com](http://www.wingsoverhouston.com)

Nutcracker Market  
Nov 9th - Nov 12th  
Reliant Park  
[www.houstonballet.org](http://www.houstonballet.org)

## September 2006



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## Receiving too many credit card offers?

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), the consumer credit reporting agencies are permitted to use your name on lists reported to creditors or insurers to make firm offers of credit or insurance. The FCRA also provides you the right to "Opt-Out" which prevents the consumer credit reporting companies from providing your credit file information for offers that are not initiated by you.

If you choose to Opt-Out, you will no longer be included in firm offer lists provided by the four credit reporting companies. If you are not receiving firm offers because you have previously completed a request to Opt-Out, you can request to Opt-In, so you may begin receiving offers again. To find out more about Opting Out or Opting In, visit the website, [www.optoutprescreen.com](http://www.optoutprescreen.com).



*Count on it.*

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A publication from Plus4 Credit Union

# members' plus

## Hurricane Awareness

History teaches us that a lack of hurricane awareness and preparation are common threads among all major hurricane disasters. By knowing your vulnerability and what actions you should take you can reduce the effects of a hurricane disaster.

### Prepare a Personal Evacuation Plan

- +Identify ahead of time where you could go if you are told to evacuate. Choose several places - a friend's home in another town, a motel, or a shelter.
- +Keep handy the telephone numbers of these places as well as road map of your locality. You may need to take alternative or unfamiliar routes if major roads are closed or clogged.

+Listen to your local radio or TV stations for evacuation instructions. If advised to evacuate, do so immediately.

### Assemble a Disaster Supplies Kit Containing:

- +First aid kit and essential medications.
- +Canned food and a can opener.

(continued inside)





## AARP Recommends Cash-Strapped Consumers Turn To Their Credit Union

Have you ever found yourself strapped for cash in between paychecks? Has an unplanned expense left you short of meeting your financial obligations for the month? If you have ever been tempted to take out a small loan from your local check casher to help make ends meet, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) warns doing so could land you in a heap of financial troubles. Instead, the AARP suggests you first contact your local credit union.

Why would the AARP drive consumers to credit unions? Because the AARP notes in its August issue of *The Magazine*, that payday loans cost at least 10 times as much as a small loan from a traditional financial institution, such as a credit union. The consumer might end up paying an APR of 300 percent, 400 percent or even 1,000 percent.

The AARP explains that check cashers, pawn shops, gas stations, Internet companies and others make small, short-term, and very high-interest-rate loans that go by a variety of names: "payday loans," "cash advance loans," "check advance loans," "postdated check loans," or "deferred-deposit check loans." How it works: In most cases, the consumer would write a personal check payable to the lender for the amount he/

she wishes to borrow plus a fee. The check is dated for their next payday or another day within the next couple of weeks when the consumer has to repay the loan. At that time, the consumer usually has three options: let the lender deposit their check automatically, pay the lender in cash equal to the amount of the check, or roll over the loan and pay the fee again.

While payday lenders make it easy to get cash consumers need, the AARP strongly urges consumers to avoid them. Their convenience, the AARP reports, comes at a very high price. For example, the typical fee for a \$100 two-week payday loan is \$15. When figured over a year, that is a 391 percent annual percentage rate (APR). Compare that to the 18 percent APR of the average credit card.

How do you tell the difference between a predatory lender and a fair one? Here are questions to ask that should alert you:

1. Will you check my credit history? If you hear "No credit check needed," an alarm should go off.
2. What is my annual interest rate? Ask until you get an answer, and get it on paper.
3. Can I repay the principal in installments? Many predatory lenders have all-or-nothing payment policies.

## Planning 4 the future

### 401(k) Rollovers Lump Sum Distributions Individual Retirement Planning

Do you have questions and concerns such as: Should I do a rollover? Will I need to supplement my income? What will I do with my savings plan proceeds? Am I eligible for 5 or 10 year averaging? How will taxes affect me? Should I elect the survivor benefit option? Can I afford to take early retirement?

Why go someplace else for help? Contact Veronica Estrada, located at Plus4 Credit Union. All-low Veronica, the First Class Financial Services Representative, to help you properly prepare for a secure retirement. Contact Veronica today at 713-970-6252.

Representatives are registered, securities are sold, and investment advisory services are offered through CUNA Brokerage Services, Inc. (CBSI), member NASD/SIPC, a registered broker/dealer and investment advisor, 2000 Heritage Way, Waverly, Iowa 50677, toll-free (866)512-6109. Nondeposited investment and insurance products are not federally insured, involve investment risk, may lose value and are not obligations of or guaranteed by the financial institution. CBSI is under contract with the financial institution, through the financial services program, to make securities available to members.

### Take Advantage Of Your Free Credit Report

Under the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act (FACT Act), consumers can request and obtain a free credit report once every 12 months from each of the three nationwide consumer credit reporting companies - Equifax, Experian and Transunion.

Fight identity theft by monitoring and reviewing your credit report. You may request your free credit report online, by phone or through the mail.

AnnualCreditReport.com is a central site that allows you to request your free credit report online. The site is sponsored by all three credit reporting agencies. Visit the website today to protect yourself from identity theft.

For more information, contact your local Red Cross Chapter, National Weather Service office, or emergency management agency.

American Red Cross: [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)  
National Weather Service: [www.nws.noaa.gov](http://www.nws.noaa.gov)  
Federal Emergency Mgmt Agency: [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)

## Plus4 Delivers Dreams To The Hispanic Community

By Sharyn Alden

For 77 years we've been in the neighborhood, and we've been delivering dreams of affordable and highly personal financial services. But now, Plus4 is playing an even stronger part in serving the needs of the Hispanic community.

The credit union recently received the distinguished "Juntos Avanzamos" award - the Spanish name means "together we advance" from the Texas Credit Union League (TCUL), and is one of only three credit unions (the other two are Denton and Fort Worth) in Texas honored with the designation. TCUL represents nearly 600 credit unions in the state.

TCUL encouraged Plus4 to apply for the designation knowing of their passion behind helping the Hispanic community.

"The Juntos Avanzamos award is huge for us," says Vladimir Stark, CEO/President of Plus4. "When members see the program's flag flying at our credit union, they know it signifies our commitment to their goals and our better serving the Hispanic community." But Stark further points out, "Knowing that we are committed to helping them succeed is only the first step toward building a loyal and strong business relationship."

How does the Juntos Avanzamos award make a differ-

ence to members? "Our sign-in sheets both in English and Spanish," says Lupe Mendoza, Manager of Strategic Development. "The member has the option of interacting with us in Spanish or English and there is at least one bilingual employee in each of our departments."

Recently, Plus4 received the prestigious "Juntos Avanzamos" designation from the Texas Credit Union League

How have members reacted to the news that the credit union has been honored by the designation? By all accounts, the Hispanic community is elated. "They are thrilled that there is someone who can communicate with them when they walk in or call us," says Stark. "And unlike other financial institutions, Hispanic members are delighted that they don't have to wait long for someone to speak Spanish with them," adds Stark.

In addition to offering bilingual financial services to its members, Plus4 recognizes that educating people is crucial toward helping them fulfill their dreams. "That's the key to better serving the Hispanic community," says Stark.

Partnering with the Hispanic community to deliver the dreams of affordable financial solutions is in full swing at Plus4 Credit Union. "We are committed to helping them succeed," says Stark. "But it is only the first step towards building loyal partnerships and helping them improve their lives."

## Scholarship Winners Announced

We'd like to thank all members who sent in scholarship applications. With so many great applications, our scholarship committee struggled with choosing 7 winners, one being the winner of our \$1,000 Scholarship, Jaquita Montgomery.

Jaquita will be a Junior attending Texas Southern University this year, pursuing a degree in Pharmacy. To read Jaquita's winning essay, please visit the tools and education page of our website and it will be posted under Scholarship.

Winners of the \$500 scholarships are:  
Michelle Baker  
Oneisha Conley  
Sharieka Crawford  
Brandon Curtis  
Kristen Kubiak  
Larissa Sandoval

Plus4 was able to provide \$4,000 in scholarships to current members with funds raised during our annual golf tournament that is held in March. If you would like to participate in our annual golf tournament, please contact Plus4's Marketing Dept at 713-970-6200.

### Plus4 recently received this heart-warming letter from a member....

6/16/06  
God Bless You All. My credit union has always been there for me over the years. This last relief that you presented touched my heart in ways I cannot explain. This last loan sealed a much needed vacation for myself and my sister, who got me to join the credit union over 10 years ago and I have never regretted it.

You see, in December I won 2 round-trip tickets anywhere Continental flies and knew I had to take my sister for her 50th birthday, this past May 25th, to Jamaica. She is a cancer survivor and has always wanted to go to Jamaica. The loan came just in time, as I had no idea where I would get the money for hotel, etc. God came through, through you, Thank You!! Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

-Plus4 Member

## Hurricane Awareness (con't from cover)

- +At least 3 gallons of water per person.
- +Protective clothing, rainwear, and bedding.
- +Battery-powered radio, flashlight, and extra batteries.
- +Special items for infant, elderly, or disabled family members.
- +Written instructions on how to turn off electricity, gas and water if authorities advise you to do so. (A professional will need to turn natural gas service back on).

### When A Hurricane Watch Is Issued

- +Listen to your local radio or TV station for up-to-date storm information.
- +Prepare to bring inside any lawn furniture, outdoor decorations, trash cans, hanging plants, and anything else that can be picked up by the wind.
- +Prepare to cover all windows of your home. If shutters have not been installed, purchase precut 1/2" outdoor plywood boards for each window of your home. Install anchors for the plywood and predrill holes so you can put it up quickly. Note: Tape does not prevent windows from breaking, so taping windows is not recommended.
- +Fill your car's gas tank and get some emergency cash for gas and supplies for before and after the storm.
- +Check batteries and stock up on canned food, first aid supplies, drinking water, and medications.

### When A Hurricane Warning Is Issued

- +Listen to the advice of local officials, and leave if they tell you to do so.

- +Complete preparation activities.
- +If you are not advised to evacuate, stay indoors, away from windows.
- +Be aware that the calm "eye" is deceptive; the storm is not over. The worst part of the storm will happen once the eye passes over and the winds blow from the opposite direction.
- +Be alert for tornadoes. Tornadoes can happen during a hurricane and after it passes over. Remain indoors, in the center of your home, in a closet or bathroom without windows.
- +Stay away from flood waters. If you come upon a flooded road, turn around and go another way. If you are caught in a flooded road and waters are rising rapidly, get out of the car and find higher ground.

### Know what to do after a hurricane is over

- +Keep listening to the radio or local TV stations.
- +If you are evacuated, return home when local officials tell you it is safe to do so.
- +Inspect your home for damage.
- +Use flashlights at all times; avoid using candles.

For more information, contact your local Red Cross Chapter, National Weather Service office, or emergency management agency.

American Red Cross: [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)  
National Weather Service: [www.nws.noaa.gov](http://www.nws.noaa.gov)  
Federal Emergency Mgmt Agency: [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)



## Q & A

### Answers To Your Finance Questions

Here are some answers to your most common financial questions.

**Q** My credit score is a mess. How can I clean it up?

**A** Pay your bills on time. Your payment history accounts for approximately 35% of your credit score. Another 30% is based on how much you owe. Owing some money is fine, but if your balances are too large, lenders worry that you're overextended and won't be able to repay them. About 15% of your credit score is based on how long you've had your credit history. The longer the better. Avoid closing a lot of old accounts or opening several new ones because that will lower the average age of your accounts. New credit makes up 10% of your score and finally, 10% is based on your mix of credit cards, mortgages, installment loans and other debts.

**Q** I have all my money in a Savings account and won't be needing it for quite a while. Should I put some of it into a CD so I can earn more interest on it?

**A** Absolutely! CD's are a safe, easy and smart way of making your savings work for you especially when you do not think you will need to use your money right away. But make sure this is the case because if you withdraw your money early on a CD account, you will have to pay penalties.

**Q** I have been in this horrible circle of keeping a negative balance in my checking account paycheck after paycheck. How do I stop this circle?

**A** Basically, you need to either figure out how to spend less or make more. The first step is to develop a budget. My guess is that you have little bits of money going out here and there that you aren't tracking closely. I would suggest tracking every penny you spend for a month. Then you can see how much you are really spending on things. You might be surprised! If you are really spending on only bare bone things, then you either need to get another job, a second job or find ways to save on living expenses. Once you get used to living on less money, you will be surprised how easy it is.