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 Organization for
 Rational Thinking
 (SORT)**

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NEW WEBSITE DESIGN!!

Take a look at our hot, newly
 redesigned Website—courtesy
 of web designer Teresa Lum.
 Check it out!

<http://www.quiknet.com/~kitray>

SORT's Next Meeting:

**Wednesday, Sept. 29, 1999
 7:00 P.M.**

La Sierra Community Center,
 Room 405
 5325 Engle Road
 Carmichael, CA

The *SORTified* NEWS

**SPECIAL EVENT!
 SEPTEMBER 29th
 MEETING—**

**Magician and Skeptic
 BOB STEINER PRESENTS:
 HOW DO PSYCHICS DO IT?**

7:00 p.m., September 29, 1999
 La Sierra Community Center,
 Room 405, 5325 Engle Road,
 Carmichael

*Be prepared to have your grasp
 of reality seriously challenged!*

A rare treat is in store for us this
 month as Bob Steiner, master
 magician, comes to visit SORT.
 He'll give an uncannily
 believable demonstration of what
 passes in many circles as Psi,
 Psychic, or Extrasensory
 Perception. Think you're
 skeptical? Hold onto your gold
 fillings!

Bob, as we may have mentioned,
 has a fistful of credentials. He is
 a Fellow of the Committee for
 the Scientific Investigation of
 Claims of the Paranormal
 (CSICOP), was National
 President of The Society of
 American Magicians, and is an
 Associate of the Inner Magic
 Circle (London). He has served
 on the Board of Advisors of the
 National Association of Bunco
 Investigators, the Board of
 Directors of the National Council
 Against Health Fraud, and more.
 He is author of nine books,
 including *Don't Get Taken!*

In the words of Barry Karr,
 Executive Director of the
 Committee for the Scientific
 Investigation of Claims of the
 Paranormal (CSICOP):

"Whether [Bob] is discussing
 scams and hoaxes, medical
 quackery, the paranormal, or
 simply blowing your mind with
 his talents as a magician, you
 will walk away totally happy and
 more than a bit wiser."

We'll meet as usual at 7:00 p.m.
 at La Sierra Community Center
 on Engle Road in Carmichael.
 Join us for a fine adventure.
 There'll be iced tea or soda,
 cookies, and there's sure to be
 some great conversation amidst
 the hoopla—all free.

So, just for this month, we'll vary
 from our usual round table
 discussion group to offer this
 special presentation. We will
 return to our round- (or oblong-)
 table discussion format at the
 October meeting.

**SCAM ALERT:
 "MAKE THOUSANDS OF
 DOLLARS WORKING AT
 HOME"**

The idea of working at home is
 pretty inviting, and can also often
 be pretty lucrative these days. All
 it takes is a good product or
 service, lots of hard work, lots of
 long hours, and a pretty good
 share of luck. More and more
 business people are abandoning
 the office building for the office



in the home, and many small shopkeepers are also closing their doors to open up Microsoft™ Windows to sell their products. Writers, artists, and many others all work at home. Thanks to modern communications and the Internet, America is going through a great entrepreneurial Gold Rush. But the pot at the end of the long rainbow doesn't always contain gold. Sometimes, instead, it's Fools' gold, and sometimes, too, somebody has salted the mine. While there truly are many ways to make money by working at home, the field has also become crowded with con artists, who'll take your money to "set you up in business."

We've all seen the ads, posted in newspapers and magazines, touted on television, tucked into our mailboxes, posted on the Internet and in "newsgroups," and even tacked up to telephone poles:

***"Make Money at Home,"
"Big Bucks, Little Time,
Work At Home!"
"Earn Hundreds of Dollars a
Week Working At Home!"***

And my favorite, seen recently on the Internet: ***"This is not a scam! You Can Make Millions Working At Home--Become an e-mail Magnet!"*** Do I really want to be an e-mail *Magnet* (I mean really, guys, I get enough spam already) or did they possibly mean *Magnate*?

They all look pretty inviting to many people. Well, the hand-lettered cardboard signs tacked up to fences and telephone poles

might be just a tiny bit suspicious looking. And yet, every year, more and more people, including single mothers, the elderly, the working poor and hopeful students, are shelling out money and being taken in by such scams. Hopefully sending in their hard-earned dollars to scam artists, these people wait anxiously to learn how to earn money by doing home typing and data entry, by stuffing envelopes and assembling crafts, trinkets, or electronics at home, by becoming a HUD Refund Tracer, or signing up with a "prosperous" Multi-Level Management company.

We are taking things pretty lightly here, but it isn't so light to the one being taken. Especially, as we have experienced, when that person happens to be an elderly relative living on a tiny income and pinning their hopes on some extra money for Christmas presents for their grandchildren. Sure, you wouldn't fall for it, but, after all, you're naturally skeptical, that's why you're reading the *SORTIFIED NEWS*. The chances are good, though, that you know someone who will—an aging parent, a struggling student, a young mother who sees an opportunity to make some money and stay at home with her kids at the same time.

Take a few minutes to look at the following sites on the net to learn more about some of the most frequent work at home scams, and pass the information on. Remember, it isn't going to be easy. Most people, especially the

elderly, want to believe in the basic honesty of their fellow humans, and often need that shot in the arm of hope that these scams give them. Be knowledgeable and be gentle...don't talk down. It isn't easy, and it isn't pleasant to take away someone's hope or dream, but in the case of "work at home scams," it's better now than later—after not only has the dream been shattered by the reality, but also precious dollars have already been sent to unscrupulous con artists.

SOME SCAM ALERT WEBSITES

The National Fraud Information Center: <http://www.fraud.com>

The U.S. Postal Service website on Consumer Fraud: <http://www.usps.gov/websites/desktop/inspect/consmenu.htm>

The Consumer Law Page: <http://consumerlawpage.com>

Internet Scam Busters: <http://www.scambusters.org>

Scams 101 Index: <http://friendsinbusiness.com/scams/catalog.shtml>

Sailor –Maryland's online public information center: <http://sailor.lib.md.us/docs/tips92/92.03.html>

Teenagers' Guide To the Real World: <http://bygpub.com/books/tg2rw/scams.html>



Good Stuff Caught In The Net This Month:

THE GREATEST UNFOUNDED HEALTH SCARES OF RECENT TIMES

Remember the great Alar health scare of 1989, when actress Meryl Streep appeared on the “60 Minutes” television show to warn against the “most potent cancer-causing agent in our food supply”? What Streep and the producers of the show were referring to was Alar, a chemical used to regulate the ripening of apples. According to the television show, a byproduct of Alar had been shown to cause an alarming incidence of tumors in mice, and was a dramatic cause of childhood cancer. Streep’s public accusation, along with the subsequent scare headlines in newspapers and magazines, caused a national panic. Across the nation, frightened parents and school department officials destroyed thousands of bushels of apples and countless gallons of apple juice. The sale of apples plummeted, the apple industry lost about \$375 million dollars, and many small independent growers were forced into bankruptcy. The Department of Agriculture lost nearly \$15 million, and Alar was taken off the market by its manufacturer.

Later tests by the National Cancer Institute and the Environmental Protection Agency revealed that only when mice were given doses the equivalent of 133,000 to 266,000 times the amount of Alar that a

school child might consume in a day, did any tumors result. This meant, roughly, that a child would have to drink nearly 19,000 quarts of apple juice a day in order to equal the dosage that caused tumors in the test mice. By the time this information was revealed, though, the damage had already been done, and even today many people still “remember” Alar as a dangerous chemical that threatened us all.

Unfortunately this isn’t the only time that the modern world has been frightened into panicked reaction by media health scares. Remember the great “Cranberry Scare” of 1959, Red Dye Number 2 in 1976, Saccharin in 1977, or more recently benzene in Perrier in 1990, amalgam dental fillings that same year, or asbestos in schools in 1993?

For a fascinating look at the true stories and real facts behind these and many other health scares of modern times, you might want to check into the American Council of Science and Health web page at <http://www.acsh.org>. There you can read, order, or print out their report “Fact versus Fears: A Review of the Greatest Unfounded Health Scares of Recent Times.” The 53-page report, originally issued in 1997 and updated and revised in 1998, has been posted on the site and can be read using Acrobat® Reader.

“Doubt is the beginning of wisdom.”
—Clarence Darrow

BOARD OF ADVISORS:

Juliana Manoliu
Electronics Engineer

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Robert Sheaffer
UFO Specialist, Author

Bob Steiner
Magician, Author, Bunco Expert

Lauress Wise
Mathematical Psychologist

About the Founding Members:

Ray Spangenburg and Kit Moser are a husband-and-wife writing team specializing in science and technology. They are co-authors of 29 books and over 100 articles, including publication in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and they are former co-editors of the *Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet (BASIS)*.

For more information, contact:

SORT (Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking)
Phone (916) 978-0321
Email kitray@quiknet.com

WHAT IS “SORT”?

SORT . . .

- Is dedicated to the promotion of rational thinking in all areas of life.
- Upholds the superiority of science over the mystical.
- Promotes and supports all efforts of intelligent communication that provide a counterpoint to the strong waves of anti-rationalism, irrationalism, and mysticism sweeping the world today.



Toward these ends we . . .

- Host a monthly discussion group.
- Publish a monthly newsletter.
- Host special events, talks, and presentations.
- Host a web page.

While SORT began with and still continues to be concerned with the promotion of critical thinking in areas dealing with the pseudo-scientific, the paranormal, the mystical, and the fraudulent, we strongly promote critical thinking in *all* areas of human thought and endeavor.

The core of SORT activities is our discussion group. The art of intelligent conversation is not dead. We at SORT believe that rational conversation—the meeting of minds, the free exchange of ideas and the provocative stimulation of critical questions—is one of the most civilized and enlightening of all human activities.

SORT discussion topics have ranged from UFOs to the Holocaust, from “alternative

Medicine” to the problems in communicating science to the public, from classic and recent cons and scams to the teaching of critical thinking. Our discussions are hosted by one of the SORT founders, and participants are by no means limited to experts (although they may include experts) but are made up of intelligent and questioning people concerned with the topic of the evening.

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*“Educating ourselves
and educating others”*

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

