MCWA NEWS

Since 1978

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AMATEUR RADIO

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VE TESTING

Testing by appointment only

7 PM 3rd Tuesday every other month

Resumes in September

Cost is $15 one time charge for session; no matter how many elements taken. Must show original license and/or CSCE if upgrading. Valid photo ID needed. SS#.

Steve, KB9OLD
847/477-3518

Meeting Notice

Tuesday, Sept. 4
7 :00 - 7:30 - Socializing
7:30 - Meeting

Program: A presentation on the **ARRL's Official Observer Program** by Jerry, N9AVY., an Offcial Observer. Jerry will try to cover what is the program and how it pertains to all of us.

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New Meeting Place

September 4, 2012

Crystal Lake Bank

5100 Northwest Hwy
Crystal Lake, IL

This will be our new home for the next year. The meeting room is in the basement. Use stairs or elevator at entrance from parking lot. Lots of parking, nice room with good acoustics and no noisy coke machine ! There is a coke machine in kitchen, but kitchen has a door which can be closed. When you attend meeting you will see how it makes the other place look like roach motel.

Treasurer's Report

Opening Bal.	$3997.67
Interest	.67
Dues	00.00
Checks	0.00
End Bal.	$3997.67

Barry, K9YVT

8/28/12

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LOWER DUES ?

Come to meeting to find out about 2013 dues. Change may be good for all.

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DX Wishes

I wish I could tell you that gas is $2.50 per gallon, Joe Biden has laryngitis, and Cycle 24 is going gangbusters, but all these statements would be untrue. As I write this article, the SN = 85 and the SFI = 111. The high noise indices are respectable, however. 10m continues to be lathargic, 12m is quiet and 15m has had some moderate life. We would like to see these upper HF bands open up more.

In spite of the somewhat disappointing performance of Cycle 24, DX is still happening. My log shows decent QSO's on 17m with such call signs as HA5AGS, 5N7M, JX9JKA, and some other catches.

The main performance band for DX has been 20m. Late one evening I worked D64K, the Comoros Dxpedition, on first call. Other members of the club worked them on two or three bands. Conditions during this operation favored Europe.

I do see a few DX contacts for 15m and 10m in the log, but these are rare. 40m contacts are increasing as the days are shortening. I also noticed that 80m was a little less noisy the other evening. We are nearing Fall Equinox and this will bring some changes to most of the bands. However, 20m continues to be open around the clock. It would be nice if this continues as we reach the peak of Cycle 24 somewhere in 2013 (current thinking, but who knows?)...

Across September look for announced DX operations from Madagascar, Reunion, Nauru, Swain's Island, Liechtenstein and Conway Reef.

The other evening I heard an older ham operator bemoaning the idea that he may not see another decent Sunspot Cycle during his lifetime. The thought has crossed many minds, but good DX operators adapt to their situations. There is and will be plenty of DX. It requires a little more patience and an understanding of when bands are open to various regions of the world.

Along with cluster spotting, the best way is to take a few moments and turn the rig on. If I want a DX contact, I can usually find one. Sometimes a nice QSO developes and then I remember what the hobby is all about.

I wish all good DX..... 73..... Dave KA9OZP

BIG GUN DXer !

2m J-Pole ?

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From The Editor's Desk

Heard on the air ! " ... froze an ice cube onto a wire, flushed it down the toilet and used the bathtub for a counterpoise ..."

New Ontario Section Abbreviations

If you are used to hearing ARRL Section abbreviations like IL, MDC, SCV, WPA, etc., well... the Canadians have jumped on the bandwagon now with 4 new abbreviations for Ontario. They are as follows:

ONN - All of Northwest Ontario

ONE - Algonquin Park, Renfrew, Hastings, Prince Edward, Haliburton, Peterborough, & Northumberland counties and the cities and counties to the East.

GTA - Greater Toronto Area, The City of Toronto and the regions of Halton (including City of Burlington) Peal, York and Dunham.

ONS Ontario South. Parry Sound District, the counties of Simcoe, Grey, Bruce, Dufferin, Wellington, the City of Hamilton, the region of Niagara and the remainder of SW Ontario.

Vanity Call Increase happens Sept. 4, 2012. FCC will increase fees to $15.00 from $14.20.

Swims Bering Sea Quadruple amputee Philippe Croizon swam between islands in the icy Bering Strait Friday to cross from America to Asia in the final part of a quest to link all continents.

The Frenchman braved strong currents and near-freezing temperatures in a roughly four kilometre (2.5 mile) swim between the US island of Little Diomede and Big Diomede in Russia that he said took about one hour and 20 minutes.

Croizon had all four limbs amputated in 1994 after being struck by an electric shock of more than 20,000 volts as he tried to remove a TV antenna from a roof. He uses flippers attached to prosthetic limbs to swim.

*** The message here is that you need to be extremely careful installing/removing antennas. Watch for power lines ! Few people really understand the dangers of High Voltage electricity.

Calling frequency Many elements of the Amateur Radio press reporting the FCC's refusal to designate a non-exclusive emergency calling frequency. The folks who proposed it pointed to CB radio and the Maritime Service as precedent. Fortunately, this was recognized by the Commission for what it is: a solution in search of a problem. (*ARRL: IL Section News/KA9QPN*)

A free hamfest? Joe Serocki N9IFG, our ACC says that "TechFest 2012 is coming. 2 September, 8-noon, at the Grant Township Center at 26725 W. Molidor Rd. in Ingleside, IL 60041. $5 tailgate spots, free admission for non sellers but donations are welcome."

\Joel Kleinman, N1BKE (SK) Joel was Managing Editor of QST and died tragically is a house fire on August 18. His wife, Jayne, is in intensive care. Neighbors managed to pull Jayne out, but could not reach Joel. Joel was a gifted writer and editor. He will be missed.

The Amateur Amateur: *Some Aggravation Required

By Gary Hoffman, KB0H
Contributing Editor

Amateur Radio has been around for more than 100 years. It has added many new techniques and modes of operating since the early days. And while new methods and equipment are constantly being developed, the hobby never really abandons anything. This means that newly licensed hams find themselves faced with a dazzling array of specialized fields that they can pursue.

One that has drawn my interest is the broad field of digital communications. I've played around with several modes, had a lot of fun and done some really cool stuff. But there is a downside: Digital modes have caused me more distress than you can imagine. When they work, they are wonderful. But frequently they don't work, and I'm left wondering why. What's happened this time?

You cannot imagine the hours I've wasted moving cables around, changing port settings, rebooting, cycling power and doing "hard resets" (don't ask). I've spent much more time analyzing and debugging digital problems than I have actually operating in digital modes. My stress levels are up, my hair is all but gone and I've put on more than a few pounds stuffing my face with comfort food -- all because of an unending series of digital disasters.

So, what the blazes is wrong?

What a Drag It Is Getting Old

Here's my guess. One group of people manufactures very nice computers. Another group of people makes pretty spiffy radios. They aren't the same people. They never got together and said, "Okay, let's build these devices so that they can interact." So the two gizmos simply have no way to talk to each other. It was some very clever Amateur Radio operators who figured out how to get them to do that. They came up with TNCs (Terminal Node Controllers).

I salute those hams and praise them for their innovations. But, let's face it, that introduced a third group of people to the equation. And though the radio manufacturers, computer manufacturers and builders on the interfaces were very smart people, chaos theory (also known as Murphy's Law) cannot be denied.

The point is, there are three components, and the communications between them are never quite perfect. They are prone to go wonky. Sometimes the messages will get through, sometimes they won't.

That's my theory, anyway.

Hey! You! Get Off of My Cloud!

Since the computers, radios, and TNCs are made by different companies, there is also no ideal instruction manual telling you how to connect them. The cables, connectors and settings will vary from configuration to configuration. But if there were such a manual, somewhere near the beginning it should have an asterisk guiding you to a footnote that says --

*Some Aggravation Required

That's because once you've finally obtained the right cables with the correct plugs, and gotten everything connected, it won't work.

At least, it didn't for me.

That's when the real aggravation started. Not only did I have to install the application software, I almost always had to change some system setting in my computer. And if that wasn't daunting enough, I also had to program the TNC. I understand computers to a

but TNC language was something totally alien to me (stop chortling if you use a sound card interface -- I know you had problems, as well).

That's when the hair-tearing and the teeth-gnashing and the screaming, "What now!!?" began. My system wouldn't transmit. Or sometimes it wouldn't receive. Often the digital application program wouldn't do anything at all. Not having a triple-degree in computers, radios and TNCology, I was doomed to run into trouble right away.

I had to tweak this and adjust that and spend many, many hours on the Internet searching for support groups. I scoured the Web hunting for messages about other people having the same problems. Even when I found people who had almost identical configurations that did work, it usually didn't help. That's because they had a slightly different version of Windows, or Linux, or a different EPROM in their TNCs, or even another brand of USB-to-DB9 connector. Yes, it could be that subtle.

Paint It Black

So, what was the final solution? I haven't found it yet. I despair of ever finding it. It's probably not a problem so much as its many problems. Every now and then, I'll figure out some quirk in the system, but it never solves all of the difficulties.

The worst thing is that sometimes it will all work. There are days, even weeks, when absolutely everything is humming along. Winlink will send and receive mail like a charm. APRS (Automatic Packet Reporting System) will cheerfully perform every feature in its menu. Slow Scan TV will give me brilliant pictures.

During these trouble-free times I am so suspicious, so anxious that it's all going to fail, that I actually go out of my way to break something.

Okay, that does sound a little nuts. But what I'm trying to do is find some setting, some plug, some kink in the system that will give me the symptoms I get when things don't work. Is it the programming in the TNC? Let's try changing it. Does it have something to do with the connections? Let's switch USB ports.

That doesn't accomplish anything, naturally. I have to try very hard to get anything not to work. Every component seems terribly robust. The software is very forgiving. Everything works like a charm.

Until the next day, of course, when nothing at all will work.

The Nature of My Game

I know I should expect some difficulties regardless of what new thing I try. Digital modes just seem to have more of them than I'd anticipated. There's probably proportionality constant having to do with the complexity of a system and the amount of aggravation required to make it work. If so, I'm glad I didn't attempt anything more complicated.

But I'll keep plugging away at digital modes. They can be fun, and they're certainly useful in emergency communications.

Truthfully, though, I'm just plain stubborn.

And the latest wrinkle? People are coming to me for advice on getting computers and radios talking to each other.

What a weird turn of events.

[Editors note: From ARRL web page. This article probably expresses the frustration many of us feel with digital modes and getting everything working.]