Sparks from the Spa

Saratoga County
SCARA
Amateur Radio Association

Saratoga County R.A.C.E.S Association

A PUBLICATION OF SARATOGA COUNTY AMATEUR RADIO ASSOCIATION

SWAPFEST

The club will hold it's annual swapfest on Saturday, March 10. It will be at the Cooperative Extension Building, 50 West High Street, in Ballston Spa. It runs from 8 AM to 11 AM, and a exam session will be held in the same room at Noon.

Our own Dave NR2J, will most likely get there around 7:30 to get the coffee and pastries going.

This year, the door prize will be a Yaesu FT-65R, a 2 band handheld transceiver. It is a nice looking small handheld.

Admission to the swapfest is totally free, meet some of your friends, and have a good time. It is held in one of the rooms, so it is all indoors. We hope to see you there.

The test session is at Noon, and the fee for that is the standard $15, charged by ARRL, as that is out of our control.

This swapfest is held in place of our normal monthly meeting on the 2nd Monday, so be sure not to show up at the regular location for the Monday meeting.

Board Meeting 2-12-2018

Attending NR2J, W2JWO, KG2H, W2BEW, W5NB, K2ZIP.

- Motion passed to purchase a Yaesu FT-65 for the swapfest door prize. Any proceeds in excess of the cost of the radio will be the 50/50 prize
- Discussion and re-affirmation of the cost to equip the Fraker Mountain site with necessary equipment to install a ham radio repeater there. The configuration is different than previously discussed. Cost will be approximately $2,700.

General Club Meeting, 2-12-2018

- Dan KD2OVI, introduced himself as a newly licensed Tech, and joined the club. Welcome Dan.
- The Warren County Amateur Radio Assn is holding one of their Tech licensing courses on March 10 and 11 at 17 Lafayette Street in Queensbury. Contact Frank Gitto at fgitto@email.com for more details.
- W5BN led a discussion on the ARRL board actions discouraging ARRL board members from disagreeing with adopted board policy.
- W2BEW brought in several ARRL poscasts from "The Doctor Is In" series on antennas for the group to listen to and enjoy.

Dues Received *Jim KG2H*

Thank you all, we received dues in February from the following members:
KB2QDA, KD2OVI, N2TOM, W2BEW
If you would like, you may either mail me your dues, or please give then to me at the swapfest on March 10.

Test Session requirement. *Jim KG2H*

If you are going to take a test session for either a new or upgraded ham license, here are a few things you MUST bring along.

- A copy of your current FCC license. We need to attach the license copy to the paperwork when you upgrade. If you are unlicensed, you have a few options. The FCC form 605 requires either a FRN or a SSN. You can obtain a FRN in just a few minutes before the exam session by visiting www.wireless.FCC.gov/ULS You simply apply for the FRN on line, and you will have it with you when you come to the test session.
- Another form of ID, a driver's license is great, or any other form of ID. If you don't have a driver's license, (perhaps you are too young for the DMV) the ARRL suggests something as simple as a library card, or even a piece of mail addressed to you at your residence.
- A pen and pencil (with a good eraser). The pen is for filling out the FCC form 605, and the pencil is to fill out the bubble answer sheet.
- The proper testing fee. Currently it is $15.
- Your WITS. It is not a hard exam, so don't get too anxious about it.

Please arrive at least 15 minutes before the exam start time in order to fill out the paperwork, and for the VE's (Volunteer Examiners) to review it.

Another thing to bear in mind, is that for many of the testing sessions, the VE will have alternate versions of the various exam elements available for you to try a retake of the exam. If you do desire to take an alternate version, we must you charge you an additional testing fee.
If you DO NOT NEED to take any alternate versions, you may take the next higher level of exam for NO additional costs. For example, if you take and pass the Technician exam, you may take the General exam if you so desire, and there will be no additional fees. I have witnessed a few people who have come into the session unlicensed, and walk away with the Extra Class license.

The following is excerpted from the ARRL Contest Update March 7

The Digital Modes and the 2018 January ARRL VHF/UHF Contest

James Duffey, KK6MC

These observations are meant to provoke some productive and objective thought and discussion on using the digital modes in VHF/UHF contesting and are not meant to criticize any specific individual. Digital modes are here to stay in contesting and we need to figure out how best to use them to benefit everyone in the contest.

The January ARRL VHF/UHF contest had significant FT8 and MSK144 activity. Many new calls were heard on FT8 that had not previously been heard in VHF/UHF contests. Both activity and number of QSOs made on 6 meters were up from previous years. Nearly a third of QSOs made on 6 meters were reported as digital. Yet, there were complaints about the digital activity. These complaints included:

- FT8 is not suitable (or is useless) for VHF/UHF contesting
- The use of the digital modes detracts from QSOs made on CW and SSB
- HF signal reports were being used in a UHF/VHF contest
- 'Newbie' ops were not using *WSJT-X* in the proper FT8 contest mode
FT8 operators did not use or know proper contesting procedure or etiquette

I think that these are all symptoms of using a mode that is less than a year old and that many of these issues will be addressed as the mode matures. But we can productively direct how these problems are resolved if we deal with them objectively and rationally.

Some of these complaints are easily addressed through education, for instance spreading the word that one should use the contest mode on FT8 during a contest. Others are harder, such as dividing time between analog and digital modes.

Even though the January contest did not have widespread Sporadic E (Es) propagation, many ops found out that marginal, weak, and short-lived Es openings could be worked using FT8, and they were rewarded with additional points and multipliers. And, despite the difficulties in getting MSK144 to recognize the /R suffix for a complete exchange, at least one rover found MSK144 to be a good roving mode and gave out rare grids to several ops. There were also several meteor scatter QSOs made while in motion by rovers.

However, I find it odd that after years of collectively wringing our hands over steady or declining participation in VHF/UHF contests that some are now criticizing the increased activity that the digital modes, primarily FT8, are bringing to contesting. I realize that there is more to the sentiments some express than that, but to me, any increase in activity is good, particularly for the January contest when propagation is often flat.

I think that there are three primary reasons that FT8 and MSK144 are popular:

1.   FT8 offers many of the advantages that CW offers on VHF. To people who have entered the hobby over the past 25 years without knowing the code, this is a powerful attraction, and one not to be taken lightly.

2.   Using both FT8 and MSK144, even a modestly equipped station on 6 meters can work other similarly equipped stations out to the limits of one-hop Es (approximately 1300 miles). In some areas it is possible to work all contest participants within this radius. This is not easily possible on either CW or SSB with a modestly equipped station.

A lot of ops use FT8 on HF and many of those skills translate directly to 6 meters, although not necessarily to VHF/UHF contesting. With the proliferation of HF+6 meter rigs, this familiarity provides a large pool of potential VHF contesters. It's up to us as experienced VHF/UHF contesters to educate these potential new VHF ops on how to operate contests. Materials to help educate these "newbies" on VHF contesting practices, both digital and analog, should be disseminated on local contesting, VHF, DX, club reflectors and newsletters. We should spread the word far and wide on how to set up FT8 in contest mode for contests, and show them how to do so.

It does not do much good to complain that FT8 ops would do better on CW if they don't know CW. And there are a lot of ops on FT8 that don't know CW. But if conditions support it, they should go to SSB, and we should spread the word that when the indicated SNR on FT8 is over a certain threshold, say +6dB for SSB and maybe -14dB for CW, the band is probably open and they would have higher rates on CW or SSB depending on the operator's skill.

During VHF/UHF contests, operators are accustomed to switching modes to pick up more points, since CW and SSB don't prevent contacts with the other mode. Using FT8 in this way in a contest is more difficult since its band segment cannot support CW and SSB signals without inducing interference to the other FT8 operators in the band. Operators using FT8 must choose how to spend their time.

Neither CW nor SSB are good alternatives to MSK144 for meteor scatter QSOs during a contest. MSK144 has proved very productive and is here to stay. FT8 can also be used to make meteor scatter contacts, and hence there are now more operators that can utilize this type of propagation. I think that this is good. Matching the propagation mode to the appropriate digital modes is an operator skill to be learned.

The assertion that the digital modes take activity away from the conventional modes is a real effect and one I have observed first hand. I am not sure how best to deal with this, but educating today's FT8 operators on the conditions when contacts can be made on SSB or CW would be a start. They can go to the analog modes after their FT8 QSO is complete, after a minute or so. After doing this a few times, hopefully it will become second nature. The conflict between MSK144 and other modes is not as easily resolved as the time commitment required for meteor scatter is longer. I have heard ops explain that they work FT8 because that is where the activity is and there is nothing to work on CW or SSB, and at the same time rovers in those same areas will complain that there is no one to work on CW or SSB because all of the ops they usually work are on FT8. Emphasizing FT8 over CW or SSB because of lack of analog activity is a self fulfilling prophecy.

FT8 operators should be encouraged to monitor various forms of assistance so that they can be alerted when CW and SSB contacts are available. For example, an operator can keep an APRS window and local VHF chat room/activity windows open to alert that there are other sources of QSOs and points.

I think the digital modes offer great contesting opportunities for the entry-level operator and modestly equipped stations. Education and guidance are still needed to turn digital operators into VHF/UHF contesters.

Constructive thoughts and comments are welcome.

That's all for this time. Remember to send contesting related stories, book reviews, tips, techniques, press releases, errata, schematics, club information, pictures, stories, blog links, and predictions to contest-update@arrl.org

73, Brian N9ADG

Addition of a new board member Jim KG2H

If you look at the list of officers and directors on the last page of the newsletter (I know that's the second thing you look at each month), you will find an addition to our officer list.
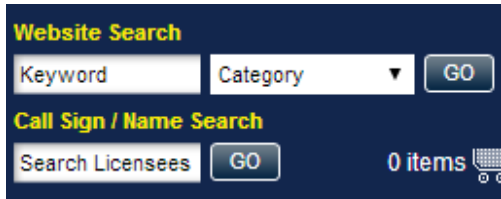
Jim McKnight, K2LM has agreed to fulfill the role of Secretary until the elections in June. He has found some of his personal time freed up lately, so he fulfilled our need for a secretary, which has been vacant for many years.

I'm sure that many of you know Jim having chatted with him on the air, but for the few of you who do not, Jim has been a long-time club member (I can't remember if he was a member when I joined in 79 or not), and the club would not exist in it's present form today without him. You know those neat repeaters, ARPS, beacons and other services we have, and the interlinkng frequencies we use? Jim is the caregiver and nursemaid to all our equipment. Do you know who is the licensee for K2DLL and WA2UMX (look it up if you don't)? Without him, the equipment and sites we have today would not be in the shape they are.

Thanks Jim.

Have you checked the expiration date on your license? It's very easy to do. One way to do it is to go to WWW.ARRL.ORG, and just fill in your call sign in the search box on their home page. You do not need to be a member of ARRL to use this service.

Website Search

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Call Sign / Name Search

Search Licensees | GO | 0 items

K2DLL repeater system:
Corinth NY
147.000 MHz +600KHz 91.5 Hz CTCSS encode/decode
448.225 MHz -5.00 MHz 91.5 CTCSS encode/decode

Providence NY
147.240 MHz 91.5 Hz CTCSS encode/decode.
147.360 MHz +600 Hz (add 91.5 Hz to connect to the NYS Network

Middleburgh NY
448.925 PL 107.2 WA2TTP-R Steve's Repeater is linked to ours via UHF

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Please be sure to visit our webpage for any late breaking news or newletter archives.

WWW.K2DLL.ORG

Got News or information you would like to get published? How about your own projects or other things you think would be of interest to Club Members? How about (GASP), a letter to the editor? Contact us at our email address :
SparksFromTheSpa@gmail.com

Upcoming program note

We are looking for input from the membership as to what YOU would like to hear. Program suggestions are always welcome. Please let any of the Board Members know of you ideas. Thanks