

F.C.A.R.C. Inc.
P.O. Box 773
Greenfield, MA 01302



FIRST CLASS MAIL



THE COMMUNICATOR THE COMMUNICATOR

October 2019

Upcoming Events

- Oct 12 Sat 8:00 am Breakfast, Denny's
- Oct 14 Mon 7:15 pm Meeting, Aaron KC1CXX on Computer Security, GCC E110
- Nov 9 Sat 8:00 am Breakfast, Denny's
- Nov 11 Mon 7:15 pm Meeting, Jeff NT1K on Flex SDR radios, GCC E110

Calendar

MEETING – COMPUTER AND INTERNET SECURITY: MONDAY OCT 14 AT 7:15 PM.

Aaron Addison KC1CXX will give a brief introduction and overview on computer and internet security; how to be safe online and some easy steps to take to secure your computer. As computers work hand-in-hand with ham radio now, it is important to make sure your computer is as secure as possible.

Secretary's Report

E-BOARD AND PROGRAM MEETING MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 9 AT GCC

Editor's note: As the Secretary was not present at the meeting, I have combined material from notes taken by Club President Aaron Addison, KC1CXX, with notes from others.

E board meeting Notes:

Attending E Board meeting, Aaron A, Anne, Dick, Howard, Keith, Jeanne

We only had one agenda item: Vote to have out club spend \$20 to get the Nashua NH radio clubs archive of videos. These videos may be of interest to our general membership and also for the board. The motion passed. The remainder of the meeting was spend getting board members set up with echolink.

General Membership meeting started at 7:14

Walter Tibbetts, Fire Chief of Shutesbury, MA was the presenter at the general meeting. He is actively involved with the update to Franklin County's emergency radio system. He did an excellent job going over the history of the county emergency repeater system and the reasons for moving to the state supported 800 mhz system. The current system is inadequate having been built out on existing towers versus new towers located for best coverage. He also explained that the equipment in the system is dated and no replacement parts are available.

There is currently radio coverage testing going on in Franklin County for transitioning Franklin County to the statewide system on 800 Mhz. He stated that the system is being paid for by an increase in the 911 tax on phone bills. The logic is that the 911 tax should also include funding the radio systems needed by the departments for the 911 system. The tax for 911 has gone from \$1.00/month to \$1.50/month. This fifty cent increase for 5 years will generate \$25 million per year. It will fund the system including radios for the towns. There are several phases to this upgrade. Phase one is expensive as the portable radios will have to be able to do analog for current VHF system and digital for the UHF new system. A portable radio will cost either \$2700 for a Kenwood or \$3300 for a Motorola. If towns want the more expensive brand they will have to pay the difference. We thank Walter for the very interesting and informative presentation.

Since the presentation the Greenfield Recorder has an article one can view at:

<https://www.recorder.com/State-officials-share-progress-in-study-of-radio-system-update-28474019>

News, Activities & Articles

UPDATE: VE SESSION AT GCC, AUGUST 26, 2019

FCARC VE Team

Two new callsigns from the August 26 VE session. Greet them if you hear them on the air.

- David Lutz KC1LVL passed Tech and General elements (and passed Extra 9/16/19 via PVVET)
- Timothy Otto KC1LXJ passed Tech element
- Another new callsign: Justin Norman has had a call sign change, was KC1HEG, is now W1JRN.

REPORT: GREEN RIVER MARATHON,

Chris Myers, KB1NEK

FCARC radio support for the marathon on Sunday went surprisingly well. While the club's two designated organizers had to back off during the week leading up to the event, Anne and Chris were able to assess the needs, identify the resources, and put together a communications plan that did the job.

Equipping Erika to operate from the race director's vehicle then from her own car, where she does not have her own radio, was a challenge to our ability to improvise in a hurry. Al found an old radio, which he set up in Erika's car before the race. Chris re-programmed a radio he has, so it would have few channels to choose from, and hopefully less opportunity for mistakes. This was then put in the race director's car just before the start of the race. Erika rode with the race director from the starting line to the end, checking on aid stations along the way. Erika helped him take and answer questions from the car. After arrival at GCC, Erika moved into her own car, to take a position along the course.

Fortunately, Erika was able to operate first one then the other radio with hardly any opportunity to get used to them. We have to acknowledge that this is a risky maneuver, since most modern radios require time for an operator to get used to their controls.

From an emergency radio point of view, we can be grateful we passed the improvisation test without mishap, but acknowledge that it is better to reduce the risk in the future by planning and preparation. I suggest that one point of preparation would be for the club to assist Erika in acquiring and installing a permanent VHF/UHF radio, with a good antenna, in her car.

We also passed several other tests of our ability to respond to sudden requests to carry equipment and at least one distressed runner from the middle of the course back to GCC. Erik volunteered to carry a long table which he only barely squeezed into his SUV, with both the back seats and the passenger side front seat folded down. Anne and Keith picked up a runner in mid-course after they closed down operations at Crayfish. Other radio operators assisted in locating and eventually helping at least one other distressed racer who stopped somewhere between stations.

Our ability to assist at the net control point was assisted by the fortuitous introduction of a ham who recently moved to the area, David Theoharides, N1HNC, at the planning meeting the week before the race. At that meeting, David said he was assigned to work for the running club at the finish line, and could carry his own hand held radio. Chris wrote down the repeater frequencies and tone settings, so he would be able program his HT and monitor traffic on the control net. This freed our club up from the need to have one of us running back and forth to the finish line.

We should also acknowledge that the Sugarloaf Mountain Running Club that organized the race did a great job of setting out enough volunteers at all the aid stations and putting up lots of clear signs along the course. Three running club volunteers on bicycles circulated back and forth among the runners in order to relay signs of distress to the nearest of our radio operators. In my observation at the end, the club seemed to have substantial number of medical volunteers at the finish line, located near our control point.

The Greenfield Recorder has a nice article on the race in its sports section, Monday, Aug.2. However, the paper reported 444 racers at the start. They must have used the number of runners who signed up, not the actual number of those who ran. By 1:30 254 runners finished. We saw or heard about three who dropped out mid-way and one or two who finished after 1:30.

Photos from Green River Marathon:



Net Control at GCC: Erika and Jeanne photo: AI N1AW



One finisher is happy, others not so much photo: AI N1AW



Volunteer on a Bike

photo: Anne N1YL



A runner with his son in a wheelchair

photo: Anne N1YL

SET (Simulated Emergency Test) – COMING IN NOVEMBER

Chris, KB1NEK

Bob Meneguzzo, K1YO, is now the Section Emergency Communicator for the ARRL Western Massachusetts Section. He has set a date and proposed a schedule for a Simulated Emergency Test exercise in the four counties of Western Massachusetts.

If you look at the proposal, you will see it is quite ambitious. It would clearly take a team of operators to accomplish all of it. So far, no one has yet expressed any interest in response to the message I sent on the 19th. Without help, the best I can do is sit at home using my own equipment and go along with the drill, but that only proves that Franklin County ARES is a very weak reed.

With enough people we could set up equipment at the emergency room (110) in the East Building at GCC and try to do the drill as a team. The question is: are any of you interested?

Chris Myers,
413-625-0344,
(cell) 413-548-4183

ARES Western Massachusetts Section Simulated Emergency Test (SET) November 2019					
TIME	BERKSHIRE	FRANKLIN	HAMPDEN/HAMPSHIRE	WORCESTER	ALL
Sunday Nov 3					
1200	Net Origination and Check - ins: Repeaters	Net Origination and Check - ins: Repeaters	Net Origination and Check - ins: Repeaters	Net Origination and Check - ins: Repeaters	
1230	Net Origination and Check - ins: HF SSB	Net Origination and Check - ins: HF SSB	Net Origination and Check - ins: HF SSB	Net Origination and Check - ins: HF SSB	
1300	HF Message to Worcester EOC	Simplex VHF to Hampden County Net	WinLink message to ARC Shelter recipient	HF Message to Franklin EOC	Skywarn Reports
1330	Simplex VHF to Franklin County	WinLink message to Worcester EOC	Priority Message to NTS for Hospital Corporate Headquarters	Simplex VHF to Hampden County Net	Skywarn Reports
1400	NBEMS HF Activity	NBEMS HF Activity	Simplex VHF to Berkshire County Net	NBEMS HF Activity	Skywarn Reports
1430	WinLink Message to Hampden County	WinLink message to ARRL HQ	NBEMS HF Activity	WinLink Test Berkshire County	Skywarn Reports
1500	VT / CT / NH Section Joint Test	VT / CT / NH Section Joint Test	VT / CT / NH Section Joint Test	VT / CT / NH Section Joint Test	VT / CT / NH Section Joint Test
1600	SET ENDS	SET ENDS	SET ENDS	SET ENDS	SET ENDS
Monday Nov 4					
0930	WMHEN Net Checkin: Greylock		ARC Monitor WMHEN Repeater Nets		
1000			WMHEN Checkin: Mt Tom		
1030	SET ENDS	SET ENDS	SET ENDS	SET ENDS	SET ENDS

WILL BIKE 4 FOOD EVENT

Ron, K8HSF

The FCARC provided communication assistance once again for the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts ninth annual Will Bike 4 Food fund raising event on September 29th. The event has been growing each year, with the cyclists choosing to ride one of four routes through the northern Pioneer Valley area (10, 25, 50 or 100 mile routes) Since Will Bike 4 Food began in 2011, the event has raised the equivalent of more than 2 million meals to families in need throughout western Massachusetts.

FCARC provided communications support along the 100 mile route in areas where cell phone service is spotty. Communications support for this event was provided by Al N1AW, Dick KC1JQJ, Joe KB1WVO, Jeanne KC1DCQ, Chris KB1NEK, Erika KC1IJJ, Rich KB1NOX, and Ron K8HSF. The location of net control was the same as last year, adjacent to the Food Bank's volunteer coordinator on the Hatfield Library lawn. There were no situations this year requiring our assistance, with the weather being sunny and cool.

As always, these events provide good practice for event and emergency communications as well as verification that equipment is operational. The food bank could utilize us in other areas of support if more club members were willing to participate. This is an annual event in late September so please keep it in mind for next year. The food bank expressed thanks for our event support.



WB4F riders at the Leyden MA – Guilford VT Town and State Line *photo: Al N1AW*

FIRST RIG THOUGHTS

Al, N1AW

One of the people who contacted me before our last VE session mentioned that he was thinking of getting a QRP (low power) transceiver as his first HF rig. I also recently found a YouTube video produced by an English ham titled "Should you buy the FT-817 for your first ham radio?" Many new hams have questions like this.

As we contemplate the consequences of human energy use and its effects upon world climate, using very low power radios has appeal. And many people get a great deal of satisfaction from using low power. I wrote last March in the Communicator about the thrill I got when sitting on a hill not far from home I called CQ with a 5 watt radio and a 30 foot wire antenna and was answered by a station in Australia. But... QRP

is a challenge and operating with higher power will yield more successful contacts and thus more of the practice a new ham needs to improve operating skills, whether using voice or CW modes.

I found this out the hard way when I first started in ham radio. When I first got my Novice license at age 14 I didn't have enough paper route money to buy a commercial or Heathkit 25 Watt transmitter to go with my Heathkit receiver. An article in CQ Magazine that came out a few months before I took the license test described a "Mighty Four-Watter" transmitter built almost entirely of parts from a junked a.m. broadcast receiver. The author also talked up the joy of QRP operation. I built a replica of the rig described in the magazine and I was ready to go with a couple of crystals for the Novice band when my license arrived. While waiting for the license I tested my transmitter with a 7.5 watt light bulb as a dummy load.

In 1957 the Novice license required a 5 wpm code test. The license was good for one year and non-renewable. You had to take a more advanced theory test to get a Technician license, and when I took my Novice test I also managed to pass the Tech/General written test at the same time, so I had both a non-renewable Novice license as well as a renewable Technician license right from the start. But the Technician license was only good for VHF, 6 meters and higher frequencies. And I really wanted to talk to hams in exotic foreign countries. No chance of that on VHF. But the 13 wpm General code speed test was a real obstacle.

My 4-watter just did not work well enough for me to make many QSOs and get the practice I needed to increase my code speed to 13 wpm. This was due to lack of operating skill, timidness about climbing trees to put up antennas, and general lack of understanding of how to make an antenna work efficiently. The 5 wpm code test and the theory tests for Novice and Technician were administered by a local ham, but to take the 13 wpm test I had to go into Boston to the regional FCC office in the Custom House. I failed the 13 wpm test twice. I thought I might never get a General license and that I would be exiled to the VHF frequencies where my dream of working DX would never come true.

Fortunately a high school friend who had more resources gave me the parts to make a better transmitter and I started to make some contacts and improve my code speed. On my third attempt I passed the 13 wpm test about a week before my Novice license expired.

During my remaining high school and college years I messed around with several homebrew and commercial radios, using 50 to 150 watts on HF CW and AM. I was off the air for a couple of years while in the Peace Corps in West Africa - off the air, but always listening to shortwave for news and what I could hear of hams. In grad school I eagerly got back into ham radio with the equipment I had used in high school. And after moving back to Massachusetts I continued to use this gear, mostly for CW. AM was now obsolete and my first affordable opportunity to get a radio capable of SSB came when I acquired a Ten-Tec Argonaut, all bands, both CW and SSB, but only 5 watts output. I really got into QRP operation.

But, at some point I realized this: QRP is a lot of fun and at the right time on the right band you can make contacts over a considerable distance with a distant random station. But I also found I didn't always want just to make a random contact; I found that I wanted to be able to make schedules to contact a particular station in a particular location on a regular schedule. In the 1990s I had the opportunity to be a visiting professor in Nicaragua for extended periods several times. I was issued a Nicaraguan license, YN1ASW. I wanted to be able to make a regular scheduled contact once a week with a friend in Massachusetts, mostly just to chat, but with the idea that in case of an earthquake, a volcanic eruption, or a revolution, (all possibilities in Nicaragua) my friend and I would both know that on a particular frequency at a known time of day, we could make a connection on any day of the week. So in I brought the TenTec Argonaut with me to Nicaragua - but I brought with it a linear amplifier to boost the 5 watt signal up to 40 watts, which was enough to ensure success with a regular weekly sked.

So, that's my story. My home radio these days is an Icom 706 - I usually run it about 50 watts output, but often I deliberately turn down the power to 5 watts or less to compete in a contest as a QRP station or just to prove a point - several years ago I completed my teenage dream of getting a WAS - Working All States - certificate, contacting all 50 states including Hawaii on CW with 5 watts. Another frequent activity I enjoy is SOTA -Summits on the Air. When I am operating portable on a mountaintop I use a 5 watt transceiver, but at home when I am "chasing" another activator I run at 50 watts. The 5 watt SOTA activators I chase from home often have very weak signals that are a challenge to receive; giving them an RST report of 339 is not unusual.

I do recommend to new hams that QRP is fun but the reliability of a moderate power level will provide practice and experience that will make later QRP operation much more satisfying.

GEEKY TECH NOTES DEPARTMENT

Bill, KU8H, from QRP-L mailing list:

Coils and condensers are used for listening to kilocycles or megacycles but those newfangled kilohertz or megahertz won't pass through them so inductors and capacitors are required. You can still get condensers from old radios or from some of the surplus sellers and at hamfests (look under the tables). Coils can be found in the same places or we can wind our own. We can still get the cardboard coil forms brand new for two or three dollars and they come with a pound or two of free oatmeal! Interesting thing about the new cardboard coil forms is that they will work for home made inductors, too!

THE COMMUNICATOR is an informational publication for members of the Franklin County Amateur Radio Club. Officers: President: Aaron Addison, KC1CXX (kc1cxx@arrl.net), Vice President: Richard Merriott, KC1JQJ (rcmpilot@comcast.net), Treasurer: Howard Field, N1LUP (howfield@comcast.net), Secretary: Chris Myers, KB1NEK (camyers1@verizon.net), Director: Belle Dyer, KB1NOG (bdyer582@juno.com), Director: Jeanne Dodge, KC1DCQ (j.anndodge@gmail.com)

This is your newsletter! Amateur radio information of general interest, club member project descriptions and doings, radio applications to other activities, corrections, or suggestions are all welcome. Individual submissions make for variety! We need more writers! Send submissions to: Jeanne A. Dodge, KC1DCQ (j.anndodge@gmail.com).

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