SPARC GAP

St. Petersburg Amateur Radio Club January-February-March 2002

Tampa Bay Hamfest Surpasses Expectations

By Paul Knupke, Jr. N4PK
\Chairman
2000-2001
Tampa Bay Hamfest

The 2001 Tampa Bay Hamfest held last December at the Manatee Civic Center in Palmetto was tremendously successful. The number of exhibitors, vendors, and tailgaters increased, as did attendance from the prior year.

For the second consecutive year a profit was made, even though the indoor table rental fee was lowered by 20 per cent this year. Several vendors commented that only a few hamfests they attended in 2001 were larger than in 2000.

After several consecutive years of losses, the hamfest was approaching a dangerous financial situation after the 1999 renewal (the last one held at the Florida State Fairgrounds.) .

That year saw one of the worst losses in the twenty-six year history of the event. Now, after two years in the black, the hamfest has returned to a much safer financial position.

The decision to move to the Manatee Civic Center for 2000 was made prior to the 1999 hamfest. After extensive research, the center was selected as the only facility that met all criteria the hamfest committee outlined to our relocation sub-committee. The exhibition and meeting room facilities are suburb at the center.

The hamfest hosted the 2001 ARRL Southeastern Division Convention. Ed Hare W1RFI from ARRL headquarters, made five presentations throughout the weekend. The ARRL forum was led by president Jim Haynie W5JBP. The many forums, including the four Skywarn Spotter Training classes, were well attended.

Amateur radio exams were administered to nearly 50 people at three exam sessions.

Plenty of space, overflow crowds and vendors filled the Manatee Civic Center for the 26th annual Tampa Bay Hamfest last December.

Hamfest photos by Mark Farr N9MIU

Volunteer Examiner Teams from the St. Petersburg Amateur Radio Club led by Mark Nixon NP3R, the Manatee Amateur Radio Club, Frank Morton, AC4MK, and the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Tactical Amateur Radio Club led by Dan Manfre WA2NDP conducted the exam sessions.

Several new vendors attended, including Cubex and Kendoo. Kenwood also returned after a year's absence.

Unfortunately the radio dealer that attended did not sell Kenwood. A second radio dealer (who carries Kenwood) backed out about two weeks before due to a personal situation which left the hamfest without a Kenwood dealer.

The indoor flea market grew about 60 per cent and table sales in the final 10 days were well beyond anyone's expectation! We had to reset the floor plan on Friday morning before the opening to accommodate the growth. The outdoor flea market (aka "tailgate") almost doubled in size.

I would like to thank the 2001 hamfest committee for its hard work: Vice chairman Dan Johnson W4BNC; treasurer Fred Hendershot N3BUL; exhibitor chairman Bob Laus K4RJL; indoor table chairman Dan Hawthorne AI4ET; outdoor flea market co-chairmen Ron Morgan KC4HAY and Sam Everts KE4BXF; forum chairman Chris Schwab N4BSA; ARRL liaison Dave Armbrust AE4MR, and mailing database manager Paul Toth NA4AR.

Most importantly, I thank everyone who continues to support the Tampa Bay Hamfest by your attendance!

We are always looking for people interested in participating in the planning for the hamfest. If you would like to be involved, please contact me or come to our monthly meeting the fourth Wednesday of the month at the Hillsborough County EOC, 2711 East Hanna at 7:30 p. m.

Mark your calendar for Dec. 7-8 for the 27th annual Tampa Bay Hamfest and the 2002 ARRL Florida State Convention. See www.fgcarc.org for up-to-date information!

(More Photos on Page 3)

“The Old Man” shows the way for high schoolers

The guy they called The Old Man? Sure, I knew him. Well, it wasn’t actually me - it was my buddy, Al. I think his family knew him from way back.

However it was, three or four times during our sophomore and junior years of high school Al called me to say that he had been invited to The Old Man¹s shack because he ‘wanted to talk’ – and would I like to come along.

The Old Man’s shack was a two-car garage, partitioned into operating room, workroom, and storage area in about the proportions of 1-to-2-to 3. His rig consisted of three six-foot relay racks full of what appeared to be home-brew exciters, amplifiers, modulators, and power supplies. The rig was dark and silent, and he never turned it on while we were there. In fact, I never heard him on the air, and later, when I got home and looked up his call in the Call Book, it wasn’t there. His receiver, a Collins 75A-2, was always on, with CW signals mumbling softly in the background.

Once, while The Old Man was rummaging in a junk box, I reached for the tuning knob to get the feel of this paragon of receivers, and he put me in my place with a curt, “Please don¹t monkey with the receiver.” Well, The Old Man had said he wanted to talk, and talk he did - for nearly two hours. He regaled us with stories of how the Radio Inspector had threatened to confiscate his spark transmitter one Friday back in ’24 because he was interfering with Great Lakes shipping traffic, and by the next

Monday he had his first vacuum tube rig on the air.

He told of being an engineer at a local radio station in the ‘30s and climbing a 200-foot tower in the wintry darkness to make an antenna repair in time for Amos and Andy. We heard how he was in the South Pacific during World War II, training island natives who didn¹t know a word of English to copy code by rote memory: dot-dash, write an A; dash-dot-dot-dot, write B; and so on. His eyes sparkled as the names of hams and radio men he had known rolled off his tongue by the dozen, and he seemed to expect that we should know these people as well as we knew our classmates in school.

Finally, he wound down and said, “Well, this is boring to you. Now, how would you boys like some radio parts, on the square?” Al managed to say, “Sure!” but I could only hope that The Old Man read the wide grin that broke out on my face as a “Yes!” That first visit he gave me a power supply for my VFO. (I had just gotten my general.) It used a type 80 rectifier, so it must have been from the early ‘30s or late ‘20s. I had ridden my bike over, and it was a real struggle to keep that bulky thing under my left arm while managing the bike with my right.

By the second visit Al was driving, and we made sure the trunk was cleared out before we came.

Good thing, too, because that time he gave me an old Hallicrafters AM transmitter; it must have been three feet wide and weighed over a hundred pounds. On other visits we came away with antenna tuners, microphones, transmitting tubes, and 500-watt power transformers.

He mentioned that the transformer secondary was 900 volts rms, and when I asked him what ‘rms’ meant, The Old Man practically exploded: “How can you do anything in radio if you don’t know what rms means?” So he sat me right down and explained it to me, and even though I was still a little shaky on the details I told him that I understood it perfectly, Yes Sir!

Well, that’s about all. We were supposed to see The Old Man again one Saturday in late May, but Al got a call on Friday that they¹d taken him to the hospital, and a few days later we heard that he’d died.

Say, look – I’ve got to be getting home. The kid across the street is into computers, and I told him that if he’d come over after supper I’d give him my old PC and a modem and some other junk. It’s funny, that kid comes over and gets me talking and he don’t leave for maybe two, three hours.

73 de K8JWR

The Hertzian Herald

Manatee Hamfest 2001

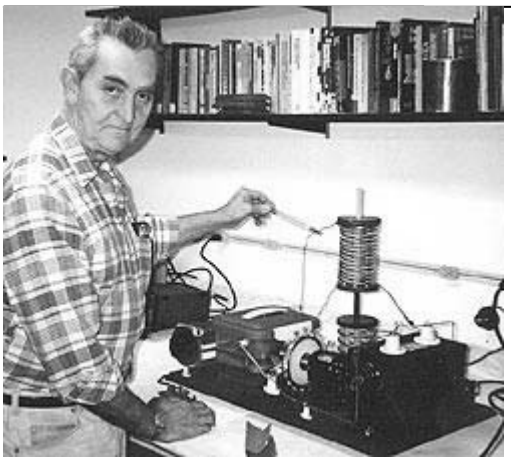
Hundreds of Hams from across the state and around the country attended the 2001 renewal of the Manatee Hamfest that was the best one yet.

Evidence of the busy floor within the Manatee Convention Center are the fully stocked booths. Vendors from major electronics and ham supply companies attended and hundreds of hams browsed and bought.

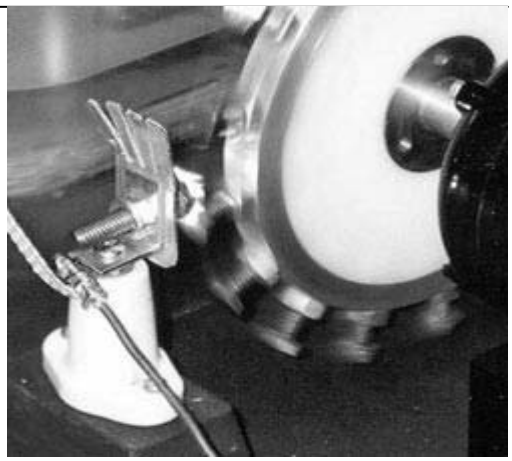
The Hamfest grows more popular as word spreads about the great facility, friendly Hams and variety and quality of goods.

Dee Turner N2MNC (above right) attends the SPARC booth.

Photos by Mark Farr N9MIU



The Real Spark Gap!



David Wilson, VE3BBN, "tunes up" his spark transmitter.

Wilson, who lives near Niagara Falls, Ontario, built a low-power rotary spark transmitter and secured permission from Industry Canada (that David Wilson, VE3BBN, reports his commemorative spark gap transmissions Dec. 12 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Marconi's 1901 transatlantic experiments were heard hundreds of miles away. Wilson, who lives near Niagara Falls, Ontario, built a low-power rotary spark transmitter and secured permission from Industry Canada (that country's FCC equivalent) to use it briefly on 80 meters. He transmitted "MARCONI S" twice a minute and said he got more than 450 reports but estimated that only about 60 of them were valid. "The best distance was Kansas City," he said--some 850 miles away. He noted that the majority of the reports were in the 200 to 400-mile range. Additional information, photos and audio of what his transmitter sounds like are available on the "Spark Gap Transmitter Signals for Marconi Centennial" Web site http://www.qsl.net/g4rfr/marconi.htm. [David Lawrence, VA3ORP, Photos)

Log program...Where art thou?

By Mark Farr N9MIU

Last month W4GAC was opened for the NAQP and all who participated had a fun time. Many hams watched, operated and logged into the 10-meter SSB world- wide contest. We have the making of a fine SPARC contesting group! John Stark KU4BT; Rick Rutan K4BNE; Kenney Larrison W4KEN (He gave me $15 and paid his SPARC dues for 2002. I haven't seen Donn or Susan yet!) and myself would make up the core.

The club station is getting used more frequent;y and since we have a good computer and a call sign database on CD, I was thinking how nice it would be to have a Windows-based logging program. One that is suitable for just about any contest or special event the club would participate in and is "Mark" proof!

There are several good programs out there, bu they cost money, usually under $100. I would gladly contribute to a very good, easy-to-use, Windows-based logging program.

Mark Farr N9MIU

It would be licensed to W4GAC_SPARC and would be used at the club station. I am open to suggestions as to which program to get, if the board approves of this "hair-brained " idea. Now my head hurts along with my knee!

So what do you think? Comments, suggestions or gripes. Please respond.

A starter 2M for sale!

F/S, 2M HT Santec HT-1200, base stand and charger, leather case, AEA HR-1 ant. $50

2m window mount 3db gain ant. $10

For more info call Dick KF4NS 727-527-1331 kf4ns@arrl.net

Thanks, 73, Dick

(You've got something for sale? Put it in the SPARC GAP and see how fast it sells!)

Oregon hams practice for a terrible happening

By Gillian Flaccus
The Associated Press

HERMISTON, Ore. - Whitley Smith sits by his amateur radio every night and listens to conversations that can run from old men talking about the dangers of drugs to South American lovers swapping recipes for aphrodisiacs.

"You never know what you're going to hear," said Smith, 51, who has dabbled in amateur radio for 21 years. "This is just a fun thing to do."

Ham-radio operators such as Smith long ago earned a reputation as quiet, nerdy types who spend hours hunched over their radios talking shop. But the hobby has a serious side.

As part of a small group of volunteers, Smith would be among the first to respond to a disaster at the Umatilla Chemical Depot in Eastern Oregon, where the Army stores 12 per cent of the nation's chemical weapons.

Thousands of ham volunteers are part of the nation's basic emergency response to disasters from hurricanes to massive chemical explosions. Most are self-trained and operate from their homes or cars.

"Our function is to provide a backup system when the primary communication systems - the phones and computers - fail," said Gary Cooper, district emergency coordinator and president of several amateur-radio emergency groups in Eastern Oregon.

Since Sept. 11, volunteers say, they have felt an added urgency as they practice their hobby. "I think we're all on heightened alert... and I think we have to be,"

Smith said, "I think the chemical depot would be a prime target for terrorists. We've got sarin, VX and mustard out there."

Cooper said membership applications have increased fivefold since the terrorist attacks. He estimates the state has 1,000 active ham-radio operators. Many counties have organized a volunteer emergency corps of 30 to 50 people, he said.

"People are looking at volunteering in a slightly different light," said Cooper, who carries a county-issued pager in case of emergencies. "I take this very seriously because it's a serious job behind a hobby."

Amateur radio operators proved their mettle after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. More than 200 volunteers stayed at communications posts for weeks, coordinating rescue efforts and relief shipments after phone and fax lines were destroyed or jammed.

If a similar disaster hit Oregon's chemical depot, where the Army stores nearly 4,000 tons of nerve and mustard gas, the hams would fan out to safe locations and use their equipment to transmit messages between emergency command centers and rescue crews. All ham operators are licensed by the Federal Communications Commission and have passed tests for radio proficiency and Morse code.

To prepare for a disaster at the chemical stockpile, radio operators practice relaying messages once a week on a local network. Once a year, they take part in mock-disaster training at the Umatilla depot, using equipment purchased with federal and county funds.

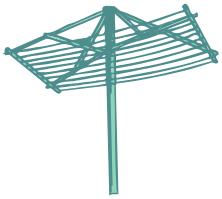
In a real disaster, even hams who chose to evacuate could provide valuable facts by radioing information on traffic, shelter populations and conditions along the escape route. With their equipment, operators can link emergency centers in teleconferences when phone lines go down.

Special television sets that hook up to portable radios could transmit images of casualties and damaged buildings to planning centers miles away.

"Their volunteer job goes with them because wherever they evacuate, they provide information," Cooper said. "They would take their gear with them, even if it's only a handheld radio."

Contributed by
Paul Knupke, Jr. N4PK
ASM & Webmaster, West Central Florida

Somebody who doesn't care is telling you where to put your ……..



By Alan Kaul, W6RCL

Many hams consider the No. 1 problem facing them these days is their ability to put up antennas.

I must say I don't know how to deal with the topic, or what kinds of stories it could or should generate. But it comes against a backdrop of failures in the last year, i.e. despite both Houses of the California Legislature approving a statewide PRB-1.

THE GOVERNOR VETOED IT!

Amazing, truly amazing, considering there was no large lobby agitating for the veto.

A couple of bills have been introduced in Texas this year, some making it easier for hams, but at least one making it more difficult.

The publicity about power line and cell-phone radiation is going to continue and many voters will infer that any kind of radiation is bad for them. So there will be NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard-campaigns) when the issue gets raised locally.

Another failure occurred at the FCC when a hearing examiner refused the ARRL petition to extend PRB-1 to cover restrictive deeds and covenants. The same officer also failed to overrule herself in the appeal. And now the ARRL is plunging ahead with plans to appeal the decision to the entire FCC Commission. The bad news about this is that if their arguments are not compelling, and the entire FCC decides AGAINST reversing the hearing officer, it will be even harder to get the decision of the full panel reversed in court the next time.

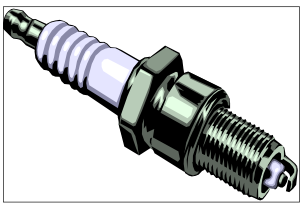
Obviously, I agree with the ARRL position, but I am not convinced the League's case was compelling. When you're a lawyer (and I'm not) you don't want to appeal a bad case to the supreme authority because that'll make it easy for them to turn you down. And then it becomes harder to get the issues reheard the next time.

So here's a task for all hams, PIO's and PIC's. Brainstorm a bit and see what you can do to generate a campaign to make amateur antennas essential to America's future, indispensable to the country's well-being.

Maybe some of the campaign falls within the framework of the "getting ready for extreme weather" stories. Maybe some of it is a First Amendment issue. Maybe some of it falls elsewhere.

But, no matter, the ball is in your court and the future of Amateur Radio (and our ability to put up antennas) might well be in your hands.

It's a big responsibility.



SPARC GAP
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Mailing
Address
Goes
Here

Next club meeting Feb. 1, 2002.
SPARC license classes are under way at the Red Cross Building.

In This Issue... **"The Old Man" gives high schoolers a lesson in life, too … Page 2.**

DATE LOG - 2001

SPARC meetings - First Friday every month. Red Cross Building
818 4th St. N, St. Petersburg
Testing sessions - Fourth Monday every month.
Feb. 8-10, Orlando HamCation, Central Florida Fairgrounds, Orlando.
SPARC picnic - Feb. 17, 10 a.m. til ? - At Lake Seminole Park.

AREA REPEATERS & WEB SITE

SPARC Repeaters: 147.06+, 224.66-, 444.475+.
Web site: www.qsl.net/W4GAC - Webmaster Dee Turner N2MNC.
CARS repeaters: 146.970-, 224.940-, 444.150+, 444.450+.
Metro repeater: 147.360+PL 127.3.
WCF Section Net: Sundays 7:30 p. m., Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays 9 p. m., 145.430+ & 442.950+(100Hz) sub-audible tone required.

SPARC'S 2002 BOARD

President - Donn Davis N4KII	**527-9636**
Vice-president - Dee Turner N2MNC	**548-7474**
Secretary - Grace Harris KG4CTG	**894-1447**
Treasurer - Susan Dillon KD4FEZ	**302-0611**
Board - Mark Farr N9MIU	**895-9201**
Norm Martin AG4BI	**712-8964**
Bill Zulas KG4HPM	**725-4020**
PIO & Newsletter Editor	
Phil Gulick KG4IGX	**392-3481**
Special Events Co-ordinator	
Ken Hopkins WA9WCP	**525-8411**

Metro Club elects Smokey Stover as its new president; Loibl, Merritt, Norton also on the 2002 board

By John Stark KU4BT

The Metro Club held elections in January and Richard "Smokey" Stover KI4CU was elected president, replacing John Stark KU4BT, who had served in that capacity for one year.

Other officers elected were: Dave Loibl N3QLD, St. Petersburg, vice president; Jeff Merritt KF4GQW, Pinellas Park, secretary, and Ron Norton N2TIE, Clearwater, treasurer.

The new officers were to be installed at the club's February 11 meeting by Sandy Donahue W4RU, vice-director of the Southeast Division of the ARRL.