



# SPARC Gap

The Official Newsletter of the Saint Petersburg Amateur Radio Club

Vol. 4 No. 1

March 2026

## SPARC Begins the Relocation from DMI

by: Ed Erny, NZ1Q

Photos by: Ed Erny, NZ1Q

The St. Petersburg Amateur Radio Club has begun a new chapter in its long history. After many years of station operation, the club will be relocating from the DMI Research facility in Pinellas Park, FL at the end of 2025. SPARC's Antenna Team started the process and gathered at the club site on November 10, 2025 to dismantle several antennas and to prepare equipment for transport & storage.

The antenna team – Craig, KM4FXP; Terry, K2TLC; Ryan, AF4O; Tom, NY4I; Bob, KC4SXO; John, KI4UIP; Will, W7WMS; Ed, NZ1Q and Doug, N8PYN met at the clubhouse early that morning with tools and safety equipment in hand.

Craig and Terry took the lead by carefully disassembling the 40-meter vertical located atop a shipping container.



*Craig-KM4FXP, Ryan-AF4O & Terry-K2TLC* They then removed the 2-meter vertical antenna from the building. Once the 40m antenna was partially dismantled, Ryan joined in to help remove the antenna and its quad-pod stand from the perch where they had been mounted for years. This was happening while the ground crew below coordinated the handling of each piece as it came down and subsequently organizing it for storage.

Across the property, John and several others focused on the remote tower that supported one end of the 160-meter dipole antenna. John carefully cut the tower off at its base as the rest of the crew helped guide it safely to the ground.

Teamwork and effective communication ensured the operation ran smoothly throughout the day. By afternoon, all the removed antennas, tower sections and related hardware were stored either inside the shipping container or behind it for later transport.



This effort marked the first major milestone in SPARC's relocation project. Over the coming weeks, additional work parties will continue preparing the club's station and antennas for their move to a new home. This will ensure that SPARC's signal will continue to be heard loud and clear across the bands for years to come.

## Winter Field Day 2026 Dry-Run Report

by: Tom Schaefer, NY4I

Members of the Clearwater Amateur Radio Society (CARS), St. Petersburg Amateur Radio Club (SPARC) and the Upper Pinellas Amateur Radio Club (UPARC) met at the Clearwater Fire Training Center on June 21 for the Field Day Dry-Run.

We started at 9:00 AM and were able to finish up by 11:30 AM. It is a few well-spent hours to make sure we have all the little cables and other accouterment that radios and computers need to operate (microphones, CW keys, foot switch, USB cables, etc).

The dry-run was successful and everything was deemed operational in preparation for the following weekend's big event.



# SPARC Cap

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## SPARC Members Attend HamCation 2026 with a POTA Activation Along the Way

by: Orin Walker, KG1S  
Photos by: Bruce H. Solov, K2BHS

On February 13, 2026, Bruce Solov (K2BHS) and I, Orin Walker (KG1S) made the trip from St. Petersburg to Orlando, Florida to attend HamCation. HamCation is now recognized as the second-largest amateur radio gathering in the U.S., behind Hamvention in Dayton, Ohio. Along the way, we took advantage of the drive by stopping for a Parks on the Air (POTA) activation at Tenoroc Wildlife Area (US-6327) near Lakeland, Florida. The drive from St. Petersburg typically involves a lot of traffic and that day was no exception.

Tenoroc Wildlife Area was quiet, with a layer of fog that created a mysterious yet peaceful setting. The



conditions gave Bruce, who is a seasoned photographer, an opportunity to capture some interesting and unique photos while I focused on setting up the

station. I deployed eight ground radials connected to a JPC-12 plate, which was feeding a ¼ wave vertical antenna on 20 meters. This was connected to my Icom IC-7200, with a 20Ah LiFePO4 battery supplying power. It was mid-morning with a cool, but comfortable temperature. The park itself requires a small entry fee and offers convenient amenities including a pavilion and public restrooms. The area is beautiful surrounded by multiple lakes and provides an excellent location for portable operation.

A simple vertical and radial setup on 20 meters proved to be highly effective. Signal conditions were good and once on the air, we were immediately in a pileup. We

made 43 QSOs each, with contacts primarily across the Eastern United States and a few reaching further west. The activation was only cut short so that we could continue on to HamCation, but it was a highly productive and enjoyable stop.

Arriving at HamCation, the first impression was simply the scale. I was genuinely surprised by both the size of the event and the number of people in attendance. The vast halls were filled with vendors, exhibits and activity in every



direction. There was constant buzz throughout the halls, and it quickly became clear that it wasn't just a hamfest – it was a full-scale convention. One tip for future attendees: wear comfortable shoes – there is plenty to see and you should expect a lot of walking.



The main exhibition areas were especially impressive. Major manufacturers such as Icom and Yaesu had large, professional booths showcasing their equipment. Retailers like Giga Parts and Ham Radio Outlet (HRO) were also well represented, offering everything from radios and accessories to tools and parts. In addition to the larger vendors, there were numerous smaller booths offering unique items, including custom apparel where attendees could have their callsigns printed on hats and shirts.

Another highlight was the presence of well-known personalities from the amateur radio community. Content creators and YouTubers such as Mike Dahlhofer



(K8MRD), Jason Johnson (KC5HWB) and others were walking the floor, engaging with attendees and in some cases handing out stickers or simply taking time to talk.

Walter Hudson, also known as “Salty Walt” (K4OGO), was present signing copies of his portable antenna book and meeting attendees. These interactions added



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excitement and a strong sense of community to the event.

We also spent time visiting the Icom booth where Bruce and I took a photo together. Bruce, a longtime fan of Icom equipment, later purchased an Icom IC-7300 for his home shack from Ham Radio Outlet (HRO). During the event, I also purchased a Yaesu SCU-10 Network Remote Control System for my Yaesu FTdx10, along with a dual band VHF/UHF antenna.

While HamCation offers a wide range of technical forums and classes, we found ourselves primarily drawn to the exhibits and the overall experience of the event. The sheer size and energy made it easy to spend the majority of our time exploring the vendor halls and taking it all in.

We also met up with fellow club member Kyle Snodgrass (KR4HBP) during the event. Kyle had been selling equipment and reported tremendous success. By the time we connected with him he had nearly sold all of his gear. His experience highlighted HamCation's effectiveness is not only for buying but also selling equipment.



On Saturday, at noon, members of SPARC gathered for a group photo. This was a great opportunity to connect in person and put faces on callsigns. It was a

meaningful moment that allowed members to catch up and preserve the experience.

Overall, the trip was a special experience from start to finish. Combining a POTA activation with HamCation made for a memorable weekend. We're already looking forward to next year – and possibly planning another activation along the way. HamCation 2027 is scheduled for February 12-14, 2027, we hope to see you there.



**Orin Walker, KG1S** – Holds an Amateur Extra License and is a highly active member of SPARC, Tampa Amateur Radio Club (TARC) and the Gulf Coast Contest Club (GCCC).



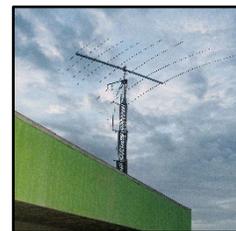
**Bruce Solov, K2BHS** – Holds an Amateur Extra License and is the Club Secretary and Newsletter Editor for SPARC. He is also very active with the Clearwater Amateur Radio Society (CARS) and the Gulf Coast Contest Club (GCCC).

## SPARC Completes Relocation from DMI

by: Ed Erny, NZ1Q

Photos by: Bruce H. Solov, K2BHS

The St. Petersburg Amateur Radio Club has completed its relocation from the DMI facility on December 14, 2025. This entailed the dismantling and removal of the remaining antennas and tower.



The dedication of twenty club members made this significant effort possible. They volunteered their time and energy to dismantle, pack and carefully transport valuable equipment. The

teamwork displayed throughout the project was exceptional. The well-coordinated group worked efficiently to ensure that everything was safely completed on schedule.

Special recognition to Tom, NY4I, our club president, whose leadership, organization and motivation were instrumental in making the project successful. Despite the scope and physical demands of the work, his ability to rally members and keep the effort moving forward, which allowed the entire operation to be completed in December. Tom's commitment and guidance exemplify service and leadership within the SPARC radio club.



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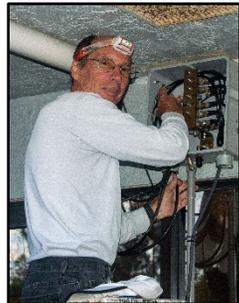
SPARC also extends a special thanks to Craig, KM4FXP



who contributed the essential tools including ladders and a trailer that supported much of the antenna and tower work. Also, a special thanks goes out to Mike, KN4LVA whose expertise, power tools and a large flatbed trailer. The trailer was critical for the safe

removal and loading of the tower and base. Once everything was secured on the trailers, the antennas and tower were transported to the Wyoming Antelope Club site where they may be assembled into a future radio shack and tower installation later this year.

Additionally, special thanks to Pat (AAØØ), Ryan (AF4O), Bill Z. (WZ4GW), Bob (KC4SXO), Will (W7WMS), Paul (KA4IOX), Bruce (K2BHS), Doug (N8PYN) and others for their help. SPARC also thanks Marty (W4AFP) for his efforts in coordinating with the Wyoming Antelope Club.



Marty serves on the Wyoming Antelope Club's board of directors.

SPARC will also hold our monthly meetings in one of the existing classrooms at the site. This project shows a strong example of cooperation, skill and dedication by all who participated.

## We Worked Alaska with a Blanket and Tape

by: Orin Walker, KG1S

Photos by: Bruce H. Solov, K2BHS

The idea of building a "Ham Space Blanket" was inspired by a video from Simon Stribling, VA7BIX of Victoria, BC, on his *HamJazz* You Tube channel.

- Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@thehamjazz>
- Inspiration Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PA2KTFpTpKE>.

Simon is an Amateur Radio Operator who enjoys experimenting with Mylar while building HF antennas. In the inspiration video, he explains that traditional ground radials often lose RF into the earth, whereas Mylar, which is a reflector, can bounce RF back towards the antenna, improving efficiency and helping more signal reach the ionosphere.

In the video, Simon says that he attached eleven strips of one inch (25.4 mm) metal tape, each cut to 7 feet (2.13 m) and arranged across the middle, along with some fractal patterns on each side of a Mylar space blanket. He then added two 16.5 ft (5.03 m) strips on the long side and another 7 ft (2.13 m) strip along the outer edge. Clipping the space blanket to his antenna to act as a ground plane, he demonstrates receiving outstanding signal reports on 10 and 20 meters during multiple QSOs. One contact said Simon's signal was the strongest it had ever been. He then added a coil to his setup to work 40 meters with outstanding results. Simon was shocked by his results. Overjoyed, Simon threw both hands in the air and then let out his signature WOOOOHOOOO!

Inspired by Simon's video, I ordered a heavy-duty Mylar space blanket and aluminum tape from Amazon in April of 2025. At the time, the blanket was priced at \$18.99 and a pack of 1 inch x164 ft. (20 mm x 50 m) rolls of aluminum foil tape cost \$18.71 (prices may vary).



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- Space blanket:  
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00HJTH91S>
- Tape:  
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0CKVVH25V>

Both sat untouched in my closet until August 2025 when I went to visit dad, in Ocala, FL. After a recent passing of my sister and mom, I wanted to spend some time with him to help as he adjusted to life without them. We always have plenty of time for good talks and working on things around the house. Since my dad does not have internet, I knew I would have some downtime, so I brought the space blanket along as a project.

The space blanket measures 58 x 98 in. (1.47 x 2.49 m) and weighs just 3.2 oz. (90.7 g). It's much thicker and durable than an ordinary space blanket. I laid it out on



the floor and started at one corner leaving about 6 in. (15.2 cm) extended as a flap. I folded the flap on to itself, creating the feed point for the aluminum tape pattern. This flap also serves as a handy

connection point to attach the blanket to the antenna.

I did not review Simon's video at the time of construction. So, rather than cutting 16.5 ft. (5.03 m) strips like he did, I created my own design. Starting from the flap, I applied concentric square loops of aluminum tape beginning on the outside edge and working inward, with each loop slightly overlapping the previous one. I was careful not to break the tape as I rounded the corners and repeated the pattern. With a single roll of tape, I was able to create five concentric squares around the perimeter of the space blanket.

My Parks on the Air (POTA) rig is an Icom IC-7200, an LDG Z-11 Pro II antenna tuner and a CQV SWR & Power Meter. Rather than the traditional wire radials for a quarter-wave vertical antenna, I connected the Mylar blanket to the antenna's ground spike



using heavy-duty clip leads on both ends – one to the base of the ground spike and the other to the flap on the blanket.

My good friend, Bruce Solov, K2BHS, joined me on this activation of Sawgrass Park (POTA ID: US-6700) in St. Petersburg, FL to test it out. We didn't use an antenna analyzer, but rather just reduced power to 10 watts and read the SWR on the radio and the meter – it read 1.3:1. We said "good enough", cranked it up to 100 W and immediately found ourselves in a pileup on 20 meters. We made multiple QSOs, with good signal reports.

Our conclusion was that it certainly works and it works well!

We then brought the "Ham Space Blanket" to another



POTA outing in the Bradenton, FL area, where we activated three parks and again received strong signal reports. On our next POTA outing, I was curious about the SWR, so

I brought along a nano-VNA. The SWR was around 1.4:1, but by shortening the whip we were able to bring it down to 1.1:1. However, that day was windy, so we had to weigh down the blanket with some fallen tree limbs to keep it from blowing away. We noticed that when the blanket was badly crumpled or folded over on itself, our signal was severely degraded but when lying flat, our signal strength immediately improved. I ran up and down the small hill several times to fix the blanket in the middle of a pileup! Despite the wind causing havoc with the blanket, we made many QSOs with many stations reporting 5/8 and 5/9 (perfectly readable with strong to very strong signals).

To keep the Mylar blanket in place in light to medium wind conditions, Bruce suggested adding fishing weights. I added a total of eight 2.1 oz. (59.5 g) drop-shot weights spaced evenly along the edge of the blanket. Before





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attaching them, I reinforced each spot with aluminum foil tape for durability. Using a continuity test with my voltmeter, I found layering this additional tape over the existing tape could break electrical continuity. So, if you decide to build this project, keep your added tape to a minimum and run it in the same direction as the pattern. To secure the weights, I used scissors to make small holes and threaded about 8 in. (20.32 cm) of paracord through each one and tied it off with a square knot. Then I used small plastic carabiners, 2 in. (5.08 cm) and zip ties to attach them to the paracord loops. The carabiners make it easy to add/remove the weights for transport or when conditions are calm.

## Drop Shot Fishing Weights

- <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0962XFC7Q>
- <https://www.amazon.com/Keychains-Carabiner-Paracord-Lanyard-Flashlight/dp/B0B6BM35QX>

The blanket was a smashing success. Bruce and I made our first QSO to Alaska using it. Florida to Alaska on 20 meters; not bad for a reflective blanket and some foil tape!

## Tips and final thoughts:

- I plan to add grommets to the holes to further reinforce them.
- How will the blanket hold up over time? Only time will tell, but I have used it about five times and so far, so good.
- If you add lead weights, wash your hands before eating. Lead in its solid form does not pose a serious health risk, however it's still a toxic metal, so handle with care.
- Is my design as optimal as Simon's who ran the strips in 16.5 ft. (5.03 m) segments? I don't know, but it works great! When constructing, I was just looking to get as much foil on the blanket, like using a window screen as a ground plane (although I have since learned that screen radials are often cut to specific lengths).

Simon also has videos on his *HamJazz* You Tube channel where he elevates one end of the space blanket to

make the antenna more directional, similar to the effects of a Yagi antenna. Bruce and I want to try this by building a portable PVC frame to connect to the space blanket. In one of Simon's videos, he shows how the US Government experimented with bouncing signals off of Mylar balloons, proving that Mylar can reflect radio waves.

- <https://www.historyofinformation.com/detail.php?id=5390>
- <https://www.airandspace.si.edu/collection-objects/communications-satellite-echo-1/nasmA20030090000>

I encourage you to check out Simon's channel, try building your own "Ham Space Blanket" – this is what our amateur radio is all about, learning by doing. It's lightweight and highly effective in low to moderate winds. It also deploys faster than ground radials on POTA activations and it gives better visibility than radials for people and pets walking through your activation zone.

I want to thank Simon for sharing this fantastic idea through his *HamJazz* You Tube channel. If you build your own "Ham Space Blanket", I would love to hear how it works for you.

**Orin Walker – KG1S**, an IT professional and Extra Class amateur, lives with his wife Paula in St. Petersburg, Florida. He is an active member of both SPARC and the Tampa Amateur Radio Club (TARC). He enjoys working DX and POTA on SSB and digital modes, as well as contesting with Tampa Bay area clubs. Email: [orin.walker@gmail.com](mailto:orin.walker@gmail.com)

## Welcome New Members

By: Bruce H. Solov, K2BHS

The St. Petersburg Amateur Radio Club would like to welcome the following new members to our club.

### October 2025:

Benjamin Thompson, KR4GUZ



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## November 2025:

Fred Harwood, KI4GYI  
Brandon Seyl, KQ4UWQ

Salvatore Magro, KQ4ZIH  
Craig Baumgartner, (no call)  
Matthew Levin, (no call)

## December 2025:

Robert Murphy, W4GRR  
Vincent Risalvato, KD4YJB  
Nathan Walker, KR4HML  
Kyle Snodgrass, KR4HBP  
Jason Knobloch, KQ4YIZ

## January 2026:

Thomas Poffenberger, KR4HAW  
Daryl Bortel, KR4IKH  
Linda Garrison, (no call)

## February 2026:

Danielle Palmer, KR4JCF  
Michael Fuller, KR4JCE  
Ed Goodner, KB4TJQ  
Michael Hadden, Jr., KQ4WIY  
Bernard Martin, N1RYY

## March 2026:

Cody Martin, KR4IUT  
John Verghese, KR4JXA

## VE Testing Results:

*By: Bruce H. Solov, K2BHS*

The St. Petersburg Amateur Radio Club holds monthly VE testing sessions at the Club Station located at DMI Research, in Pinellas Park.

The results are as follows:

### 10/18/25

*New-Technician*  
Nathan Walker, KR4HML

### 11/8/25 (SPARC Fest)

*Upgrade-Extra*  
Bruce H. Solov, K2BHS

### 11/16/25

*New-Technician*  
Kyle Snodgrass, KR4HBP

### 12/16/25

*New-Technician*  
Daryl Bortel, KR4IKH

### 1/20/26 (Wyoming Antelope Club)

*New-Technician*  
Danielle Palmer, KR4JCF  
Mike Fuller, KR4JCE

*Upgrade-Technician*  
Ed Goodner, KB4TJQ

### 2/17/26

*New-Technician*  
John Verghese, KR4JXA

*Upgrade-General*  
Joe Leone, W4GGJ  
Ed Goodner, KB4TJQ

### 3/17/26

*New-Technician*  
Mark Schmidt, KR4KUE

VE testing sessions are held on the third Tuesday of each month at the Wyoming Antelope Club classroom in Pinellas Park. If you wish to test, please contact the club. Congratulations to all the new hams and upgrades. Job well done! Enjoy.



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## Looking for Participation from club members.

By: Bruce Solov, K2BHS

As your editor of the *SPARC Gap* Newsletter, I am always looking for feedback, suggestions and submissions for future editions.

I would like to extend a special thanks to Orin, KG1S and Ed, NZ1Q for submitting articles for this edition of *SPARC Gap*.

I am also always looking for people to submit articles to me.

Also, a reminder that I would absolutely love some *real* reviews of gear that you have (whether it is good, bad or downright ugly). The reviews are not limited to just transceivers, but everything (e.g. antennas, tuners, accessories, testing equipment, etc.) This type of information would be beneficial to new and seasoned amateurs alike. If you have any questions about this, please feel free to reach out to me.

If anyone has any ideas on columns that you would like to see in the *SPARC Gap*, please reach out to me.

Of course I can be reached by email: [editor@sparc-club.org](mailto:editor@sparc-club.org) All are welcome to make submissions.

73's,

*Bruce H. Solov*, K2BHS

Secretary and *SPARC Gap* Editor

## Current SPARC Net Schedule

SPARC Nightly 2-meter Prenet from 18:00-18:30 on 147.060 MHz (7 days/week)

SPARC Nightly 2-meter Net starting at 18:30 on 147.060 MHz (7 days/week)

SPARC 220/440 Net starting at 19:15 on 224.66 MHz/444.475 MHz with a tone of 146.2 Hz (meets every Thursday evening).



### In Memoriam

#### Silent Keys

*It is with a heavy heart that the St. Petersburg Amateur Radio Club announce the following members have become silent key:*

Darrel Groves, KV4HI  
Richard Stephens, N4BUA  
Donn Davis, N4KII

*They will be sadly missed. May their memories be cherished forever.*