

# The Groundwire

Official Newsletter of the Tyler Amateur Radio Club - July 20, 2017

## President's Message

Summer has just fully arrived and we're already thinking about our fall programs! The [Texas QSO party](#) is first on the list. It will be held September 23-24 at the Tehan building at Camp Tyler. This is a full-on contest which means it's a chance to sharpen your HF skills and compete with other hams from around our great state of Texas.

This brings to mind a couple of important points I think need addressing.

- High frequency (HF)<sup>1</sup> operating is neither as complicated nor as expensive as many hams, particularly new hams, might assume it to be. Communications on the HF bands are the gateway to international communication and a way to shrink the world around you. This is something which VHF and UHF frequencies just can't accomplish.

- How then to get started? The most important component of an efficiently operating ham shack (which any Elmer will tell you) is the antenna. Accordingly, I've asked Bob Jackson (AG5X) to give a review of basic antenna fundamentals at this Thursday's meeting.

- Which brings me to another important point: Remember on the FCC exam where it asked how much power should you use to make a contact, and the correct answer was "just enough to do the job"? A proper antenna with just 5-10 watts of power applied will outperform a kilowatt into a poor antenna. With a resonant, efficient antenna, you

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<sup>1</sup> Generally accepted as being 160 through 10 meters

don't need much power. However, to effectively operate at low power<sup>2</sup> levels requires some understanding about managing QRP operations. Gene Coldwell (WB5CTQ) will be talking to us about this in August. So, where does one get an affordable HF SSB rig that will do the job? Would you believe India? Consider the following:

Amateur radio is very much alive and well there. Mr. Ashhar Farhan, VU2ESE, has developed a low cost, QRP HF SSB rig called the "BITX40". It comes in "semi-kit" form having been mostly pre-assembled by a women's collective in Hyderabad. My discussions with Mr. Ashhar concluded with an agreement that will allow TARC members to obtain a "semi-kit" for about \$100 and get on the air with 40M SSB! The price includes a custom cabinet, mike, speaker and a heavy duty 12 VDC battery with trickle charger. (An optional switching supply is available.) The finished unit is small, highly portable and is also an ideal unit for trying out "digital hamming", e.g. PSK31. The power output of an evaluation unit was around 10 watts - plenty for the digital modes.

The beauty of this simple HF SSB transceiver is that it is inexpensive and tough enough that you can actually begin to gain the confidence needed to operate the HF bands. If there's enough interest from the membership in purchasing one (at least 10), we will re-activate the "workshop" protocol that was so successful in the past. Those participating will be "Elmer-supervised" and, as Heathkit used to profess, "*We will not let you fail!*" Assembly time is about an hour (!) even for a novice builder.

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<sup>2</sup> Called "QRP" in ham radio

- Finally, start thinking about October. The Boy Scout's "Jamboree On The Air" (JOTA) is coming. JOTA has been around since 1958 and represents a chance for scouts all over the world to talk to one another. Like Field Day, it is not a contest but is a heck of a lot of fun for the club and scouts who participate. I'm not asking you to put on your old uniforms (I'm not even going there) but if you like scouting or enjoy working with young enthusiastic folks, here is your chance. Terry Gimble (W5TG) is in charge of this event for the club. Thanks to his early efforts, we will be running this year's event with the special call sign of K2BSA/5! Terry will be bringing us up to speed on this later.

I hope to see you all this Thursday night!

73,

George Plotkin KF5WFA

President

### Notes from the June Meeting

- By actual count, there were 45 attendees at the June meeting! Several guests and a "walk-on" new member helped us reach an attendance count rarely seen. If you missed it, don't repeat your mistake - join us this Thursday for more of the same kinds of timely, on-topic information, great fellowship and *FUN!*

- President George Plotkin (KF5WFA) gave a short presentation on his vision for our club. He reviewed his plans for taking the club forward and the requirements that will be need to be met to accomplish those steps. He also made some strong points about how hams have made major scientific contributions - the building and launching the OSCAR-1 satellite being one such example. While not all

of us ascribe to being inventors, it does point out the diversity of opportunity that our hobby embraces.

- Board member Wayne Hoskins (WM5Q) reviewed the plans he's drawn up for this year's Field Day event. As part of his presentation, Wayne conducted a "mock" field day exercise with attendees attempting to make contacts. Unfamiliarity with the accepted Field Day protocols led "unintended consequences" of raucous laughter and comradery by all. Wayne admitted it wasn't exactly what he'd envisioned but it all turned out quite well anyway.

- Member Art Sharp (K5LXK) was the winner of this month's door prize - a QRP CW transceiver kit.

- Stand-in club treasurer Butch Adair (WA5SLG) reported that as of adjournment, we now have 55 paid-up members. If you haven't renewed your membership, you can always mail it in to Tyler Amateur Radio Club, Inc., P.O. Box 6393, Tyler, Texas 75711.

### What's Coming in July

- Actually coming on August 12<sup>th</sup> is the Shreveport-Bossier Hamfest. It's to be held in the Louisiana State Fair Agriculture Building (inside venue!) on that Saturday from 8a to 3p. More information [here](#) and from Bob Davis at (318) 230-1242.

- As mentioned, I will give a short presentation on aerials that I call "Antennas 101 - A Review of the Basics". I'm hoping I can inspire you to investigate and experiment with antennas because I believe there's no other arena in ham radio where so much can be learned for so little investment.

- Wayne Hoskins (WM5Q) will give a brief report on how well we performed at the 2017 edition of Field Day. A lot of work went into

the planning and preparation for the event and a goodly number of our members participated. If you weren't able to be there then your surely need to be at the meeting to get brought up to speed.

- Mark Taylor (W5MCT) has suggested that a "Talk-In Net" might be a fun thing to do on meeting nights. The idea is for a "net control" member take "check-ins" from us as we travel to the church - a sort of "pre-sign-in". Mark, you're always at the meetings early, why don't you serve as the first net control to try your idea out? Use the 147.000 (136.5/NEG) machine this first time out.

- To help re-fill the club's coffers, door prizes and raffles are planned for each coming month. This month's raffle will be for a \$25 gift certificate to the Texas Roadhouse. If you have something (e.g. gift card, a usable piece of equipment, etc.) that's surplus to your needs, please consider donating it to the club for this purpose. Remember, TARC is a 501(c)3 organization and can, on request, provide donation documentation for tax purposes.

- As always, there'll be the usual reports on membership, finances and VE activity. Members need to attend meetings if only to hear these reports and stay current on the health of your club. Fully up to date information on these topics isn't available anywhere else.

## New Members

At the June meeting, the following fellow amateurs were welcomed into our ranks:

- Pete Damron - N6ZLW
- Dion Wilson - NM5I
- Michael Brian - KOMEB

- Hank Hardisty - K3MO (past member rejoining)
- Dickie Groom - AA5XU (past member rejoining)

If you missed that meeting, make it your goal to attend this month's meeting and to look them up and add your welcome as well.

## Kudos

Pete Damron (N6ZLW) is not only a new ham but also a new member. He made a substantial monetary contribution to our club at the June meeting. A big shoutout goes to Pete for believing in us and wanting to support our cause.

There are many other ways members can make needed contributions to our collective cause. One terrific way is to get involved! Participate in club activities - or better yet - lead one; make a presentation at a club meeting; write an article for the newsletter; go out of your way to make others aware of ham radio in general and our club in particular; "infect" others with your zeal for amateur radio and help them join in the fun.

## Reminders

- *Solar Eclipse QSO Party* - Gene Coldwell (WB5CTQ) reminds us that ham radio operators will have an unusual opportunity to combine their hobby with scientific research on August 21<sup>st</sup> as the continental US experiences a total solar eclipse. History shows that during a total eclipse, there will be significant changes in the ionization of the upper atmosphere. These changes will have significant effect on HF propagation. With the increase in popularity of the HF digital modes, networks like PSK Reporter, Reverse Beacon Network, and WSPRnet

will be able to collect propagation activity in near-realtime. A nationwide QSO party is scheduled to be held between 9 AM and 4 PM Central time on that date. That will help to ensure that there is a large amount of activity can be reported. Universities will collect and analyze the mass of data. The result should be a better understanding of the ionosphere and its mechanisms. The Tyler ARC, along with other clubs will participate but details have not yet been finalized. As more information on our club's plans develop, it will be distributed via the Monday night net and the club website. Be sure to keep a watch on both venues.

- *Club Dues* - The club's fiscal year runs from June through May. Membership dues for the 2017-2018 fiscal year are now due. Full annual membership is \$25.00 and additional family members are \$12.50.

- *Hams & Eggs* - The club's informal breakfast fellowship is held circa 7:30 AM on the fourth Saturday of each month at "Happy's" restaurant, 2202 East Fifth Street in Tyler. Everyone's welcome.

- *Tech Net* - Butch Adair (WA5SLG) hosts an open technical discussion net on the club's 146.96 repeater (136.5/Neg) on Thursday nights (other than the first and third ones) at 7:00 PM. Topics are what check-ins bring with them plus what Shop Night was or will be next. All are welcome.

- *Shop Night* - Michael Fowler (W5FOW) is the host for this hands-on activity held on the evening of the first Thursday of each month at 6:00 PM. The location is 418 South Broadway "around back" (signs will point the way). It's a cordial opportunity to get up close and personal with some of the technical aspects of our hobby you may want to investigate or understand better.

- *Ten Meter Net* - Wayne Hoskins (WM5Q) is the emcee for this weekly informal gathering that has no standing agenda. The planned

meeting frequency is 28.365 MHz (+/-) at 8:00 PM each Sunday night. All are welcome. Butch Adair (WA5SLG) usually brings a few questions out of the current General and Extra class license exams for check-ins to ponder, perhaps answer and always discuss. This is a great way for new Technicians to get some early exposure to what's next and for current Generals and Extras to refresh their knowledge on topics we should all have at least a handshake acquaintance with.

- *VE Testing* - Testing for new and upgraded amateur radio licenses is conducted by local area VEs on the second Sunday of each month at 2:00 PM at the American Red Cross building located at 320 East Rieck Road in Tyler. Any schedule changes will be announced on the club's Monday night two meter net. Butch Adair (WA5SLG) is the contact for VE testing information. You can e-mail him or call him at 903-561-6099. Butch reported that July 9th testing opportunity had the following results:

- Mark Deaton - New Technician (KG5UCN)
- Archie Kopecki - Upgraded to General (KG5SRD)

Congratulations to these new/upgraded amateurs!

- *Monthly Club Meeting* - The Tyler Amateur Radio Club meets every third Thursday of the month at the Shiloh Road Church of Christ, corner of Shiloh Road and Paluxy. Call to order is always at 7:00 PM. It's always best to be there a bit sooner to enjoy the always congenial fellowship. Friends and family (and cookies, snack crackers, brownies, pies, cakes, drinks, etc.) are always welcome - bring some!

- *TARC Website* - Our club's website is the "go to" place for lots of information about who we are and what we do and have recently done. Put a note on your calendar to visit it often.

## Closing Notes

### "Under way" and "Making way"

For the sake any "landlubbers" in our ranks, there is a significant difference between these two, oft times misused, nautical terms. As prologue, one of my other passions is fishing. So, more than a few years ago, I bought a "bass boat". Sleek she was and quick as lightning. Being mindful that I'd never owned a boat before, I signed up for a Coast Guard water safety course. During that course, I learned that being "under way" means only that all lines have been released and the vessel is no longer moored. "Making way" means the vessel is actually moving under control, i.e. drifting doesn't count.

>>>> *Fast forward to the June meeting* <<<<

Nautically speaking, what President George Plotkin (KF5WFA) accomplished with his presentation of a One Year Plan last month was to get us "under way". He "pushed us away from the dock". Now, course and direction have been set. Competent hands (the Board of Trustees) have been put at the tiller. It's up to us - the crew (membership) to get the "Good Ship TARC" to "make way". If she is to successfully "reach port" (meeting the goals that have been set out), that's only going to be accomplished with an "all hands on deck" attitude by us all.

Faithfully attending meetings is all well and good, but that alone is little help towards "making way". My challenge to you, fellow crew members, is to pick up the "oar" of your choice, get it into the water and start rowing. Opportunity abounds: Make a presentation at a club meeting; Contribute to a fund raiser; Recruit a new member, etc. All such activities and more all count as "rowing".

Do you have an oar in the water?

See you at the club meeting this Thursday! Come early to help set up and then stay a bit to help clean up. That would count for at least as a "paddle's worth".

73!

Bob Jackson AG5X  
Newsletter Editor