



# Sparks from the Spa



A PUBLICATION OF SARATOGA COUNTY AMATEUR RADIO ASSOCIATION

## Upcoming December Meeting

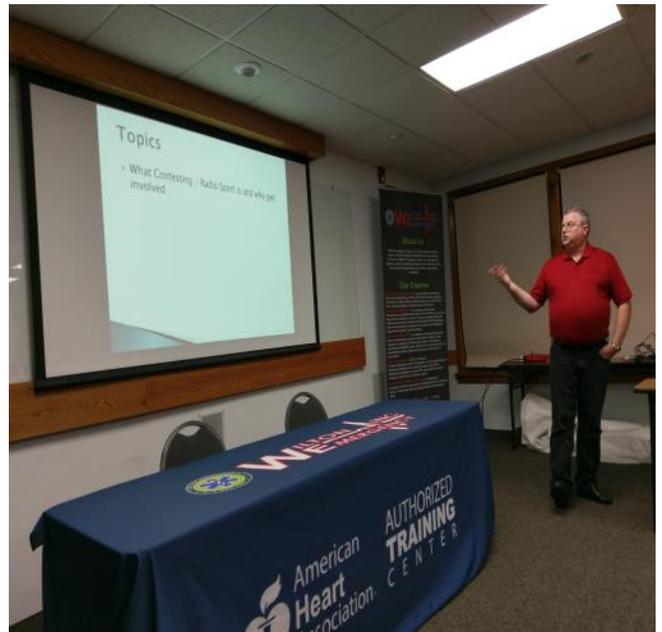
Hi all. Just a reminder that our December 11 meeting is our annual holiday get together at the usual location in the Wilton EMS Squad building. There will not be a Board of Directors meeting, instead the General Membership meeting will begin at 6:30 PM (instead of the usual 7:00 PM). The program will just be you and whatever you want to talk about with your fellow hams.

Feel free to bring along some empty calories in the form a snack to share with everyone. If you are able, you can also bring along an unwrapped toy to be donated to a needy child. We will start at 6:30 and it will last until the last one of us leaves the door. We hope you have some fun.



## November General meeting

Brian Szewczyk NJ1F, gave us a follow up on his November newsletter article on contesting. His focus was on the practical aspect of operating. Hints on tuning and calling, definitions of some of those confusing operating class abbreviations, propagation hints, greyline hints, and other good practical stuff. If you are interested in HF operating, (not just contesting), you missed a good one. Thanks Brian.



## Board of Directors Meeting Nov 13, 2017

Attending were NR2J, WA2TTP, WA2JWO, W5BN, KG2H, W2BEW

Treasurers Report for period ending 10/31/2017, on hand balance \$ 21,130. Unanimously approved.

Donation status. Used equipment donated by AA2IJ: Kenwood 430 with AT 230, Azden PCS 4000, PK232, and other miscellaneous items. To be available to new hams who need equipment to get started. The Treasurer will write a receipt for the estimated value of \$750. Fred Brown will deliver the letter. Unanimously approved.

Reimbursement of \$70 to Steve WA2TTP for his purchase of 2 Master 3 stations on behalf of the club from an estate sale. Unanimously approved.

Reimbursement of \$200 to Jim KG2H for his payment of \$200 renewing the clubs liability insurance thru the ARRL insurance program. Unanimously approved.

Report on the special board meeting held on 10-25-17 concerning the moving of equipment on the towers, and the need to purchase new antennae for the move.

Discussion of the status of the Wilton EMS building availability. We have restrictions of use of the meeting room, which will limit our ability to do any significant operating from the site, including Field Day.

December 11, 2017 meeting will be the holiday meeting, no board meeting. General meeting is a get together. Members can bring a snack to share if they so wish to do so, and if possible an unwrapped toy for donation.

## 2018 Tour de Cure Update - Lee Palmer WB2NSC

The high points of the changes:

- New home base, for the next 3 years, is the Saratoga County Fair Ground
- New date, second Sunday in June. June 10th in 2018
- New 5 Km run/walk event
- New 10 mile route. The State Park route is a memory.
- 30, 50, 62.5, and 100 mile routes have been modified to work with the new location
- Rest stop locations are still being worked on. Appears that most will be the same.
- I'm estimating the changes will require a few more operators.
- We should see more info in a few weeks.

Stay tuned..

Lee

## New Digital Modes Changing Complexion of Bands and Perhaps of Ham Radio

From ARRL 11/02/2017

The wave of software-based digital modes over the past several years has altered the atmosphere of the HF bands. Some suggest the popularity of modes that make it possible to contact stations neither operator can even hear has resulted in fewer CW and SSB signals on bands like 6 meters and 160 meters. Traditional modes require far more interaction and effort on the part of the operator; the newer digital modes not so much. The recent advent of the still-beta "quick" FT8 mode, developed by Steve Franke, K9AN, and Joe Taylor, K1JT — the "F" and the "T" in the mode's moniker — has brought this to a head. Some now wonder if FT8 marks the end of an era and the start of a new, more minimalist age.

"We've been as surprised as anyone about the rapid uptake of FT8 for making QSOs on the HF bands," Taylor told ARRL this week. Rather than viewing FT8 as a total game-changer, he sees a dividing line between such digital modes and more traditional modes.

"SSB and CW are general-purpose modes," Taylor asserted. "They are good for ragchewing, DXing, contesting, emergency communications, or whatever. FT8 and the other modes in **WSJT-X** are special-purpose modes. They are designed for making reliable, error-free contacts using very weak signals — in particular, signals that may be too weak for the more traditional modes to be usable, or even too weak to hear." Taylor notes that the information exchanged in most FT8, JT65, and other digital-mode contacts "is little more than the bare minimum for what's considered to be a valid contact." In addition to call signs and signal reports, stations may exchange grid squares and acknowledgments.

Radio amateurs recently commented in response to a Top Band Reflector post, in which Steve Ireland, VK6VZ, averred that because of FT8, "160-meter DXing has changed, perhaps forever" in recent weeks. Ireland said he downloaded FT8 but just couldn't bring himself to use it on the air. "My heart isn't in it," he wrote. "My computer will be talking to someone else's computer, and there will be no sense of either a particular person's way of sending CW or the tone of their voice. The human in radio has somehow been lost."

In his **blog**, Steve McDonald, VE7SL, compiled not only Ireland's posts, but some responses to it, although not identified by name or call sign. One commenter suggested that the game-changing aspect of FT8 is that those who typically operate CW or SSB will gravitate to FT8. "The amount of activity on the FT8 frequency of any band is phenomenal," the commenter observed. A few complained that no skill is involved in making contacts using computer-based digital modes.

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Another suggested that FT8 is already falling victim to its own success, with too many stations crowding around the designated FT8 frequencies. Others were more philosophical, with remarks along the lines of this one: "It is allowing people who have smaller stations the opportunity to get on and use their radios and a computer to make contacts they never would have been able to make. This is great for ham radio!"

Taylor would agree. As he sees it, FT8 won't replace modes such as CW or SSB. "Nevertheless, it's clear that — at least in the short term — many hams enjoy making rapid-fire minimal QSOs with other hams, all over the world, using modest ham equipment," he said. "For this purpose, FT8 shines."

In a related "lightning talk" at the 2017 ARRL-TAPR Digital Communications Conference (DCC) earlier this year, ARRL Contributing Editor Ward Silver, NOAX, challenged his savvy audience to develop a keyboard-to-keyboard mode "between FT8 and PSK31" that would support casual and competitive operating, be more interference and noise tolerant, and be usable by those with "compromised" stations and antennas. He also challenged his listeners to develop a "smart" spectrum display that would identify signals by mode, so Amateur Radio could move away from the practice of setting aside specific frequencies for digital modes.

### My FT8 Story—Jim K6ZH

After reading the preceding article, I finally took the plunge. I previously downloaded the FT8 software quite a while ago, but I was too intimidated to actually try it. I have spent some time reading the help files and a longer time actually watching the decoding box, and seeing the QSO's scroll on down the screen. This occurred over the period of a couple of months.

Configuring the radio was the easy part as I previously configured it for use with my logging program.

On Nov 30 at 21:31 UTC I was monitoring the 160 meter band, seeing if I could spot any greyline propagation, when what should I see but our own W5BN calling CQ on FT8 !

Telling myself that if I made a fool of myself, it was only Fred, and I would not be labeled a lid.

I clicked on his callsign, the program automatically tuned to his offset, and filled in the stock QSO exchanges. I set my power on the radio to 20 watts, and clicked the transmit box. Much to my amazement, his computer answered me, and then the computers sent the appropriate information back and forth between us without my having to touch any control on either the radio or the computer.

Ballston Spa to Middle Grove is probably a world record for the closest FT8 QSO ever completed, but it was my first ever digital QSO on any of these fancy computer modes.

I was running 20 watts, but I think that was most likely 18 watts to many, but I figure it was like training wheels for a kid on his first 2 wheel bike.

## Membership renewal - Jim KG2H

Its that time of the year. Our club runs membership on a calendar year basis, so its time to renew. Annual membership for as long as I can remember has always been \$10.00 and so it will be again. I have heard rumors that sometime in the past, family membership used to be \$15.00, but since all our correspondence is done via email (no postage costs for that), we credit the whole ham household for the same \$10.00. What a deal!!!

Below you will find a membership form. Please fill it out, and return it to me. Many people actually prepay their dues for years in advance, and I will be happy to mark down for multiple years. Just mark down on the form how many years you are paying for, and I will handle it. If you do not mark it down, I will assume that anything over \$10 is a general donation, so if you send me \$20, and do not indicate 2 years, I will assume 1 year and a donation of \$10.

I you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [kg2h@outlook.com](mailto:kg2h@outlook.com) and I will tell you the present status of your paid membership. I will be trying something new after the holidays, I think I can do an email merge in office so that I can automatically send everyone out their individual status.

When you fill out the form PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY. You all know that emails require 100% accuracy to work, so If I misinterpret you scrawl, it's going to bounce. Also, please be sure to circle the answer about your ARRL member status. You do not need to be an ARRL member to be in the club, but we are an ARRL affiliated club, and we need to maintain 50% of our membership as also being in the league.

### **Saratoga County Amateur Radio Association      Membership Information** **Please Print CLEARLY**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Callsign \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City State Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

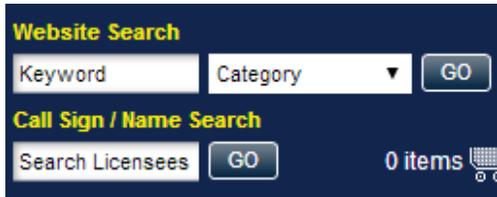
License Class    N      T      G      A      E

ARRL Member      YES      NO

Dues are \$10 per year, Payable to **Saratoga County R.A.C.E.S.**

You can mail your dues with this form to Jim Polewczak KG2H, 231 Northline Road, Ballston Spa 12020

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](http://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.



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



## Officers

### President

Fred Brown W5BN  
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### Directors:

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### Vice President:

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Mike Levy K2ZIP  
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### Secretary:

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### Treasurer:

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 KG2H@arrl.net

Dennis Kagel—WA2JWO  
 KADELL@mybluelight.com

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

[WWW.K2DLL.ORG](http://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](mailto: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

