

AMATEURS over the airwaves

by Kyle Page

Many people believe ham radio operators are men in their basements surrounded by walls of flashing, buzzing equipment. However, the Radio Amateurs of Northern Vermont can easily dispell this notion. After all, as their website proudly claims, "We have some of the most knowledgeable people in Amateur Radio."

"Ham radio is a form of emergency communication," Club President Paul Gayet said. "It's used a lot during natural disasters. We also provide communications for local events, such as the Multiple Sclerosis bike tour. We put a ham at all rest stops and one ham in charge and a ham shadowing the head organizer and relays messages for things like injuries, more water or other logistical things."

Other charity events the club volunteers its time to include the Vermont City Marathon, Essex

Memorial Day Parade, Essex Cabbage Night and Halloween Patrols, Essex Fair Week Patrols, South Burlington National Night Out, American Diabetes Association Tour de Cure, and the Burlington International Games.

"Our major event is the once a year Nationwide ARRL Field Day which is an emergency preparedness exercise where clubs and individual operators set up across the nation in open areas with emergency power for 24 hours and try to contact as many other ham radio clubs or individuals as possible," Gayet explained. "This occurs the last week in June. It's a great way for a new ham to be exposed to different modes of emergency communications. We won in 1999 with 4,450 contacts and in 2000 with 3,363 contacts. Last year we came in eighth

place nationwide with 3,304 contacts. We put on an incredible show."

The club is also involved with fox hunts. "We do this four or five times during the summer, about April through October," Gayet said. "We have a ham hide somewhere in Chittendon County and transmit every minute for about 10 seconds. Other members with directional equipment attempt to pick up the signal and find the fox. Whoever finds the fox gets to be the fox the next month. The last hunt of last year no one could find him."

In May, Dayton, Ohio is the site of the biggest hamfest of the country. On February 23rd, the club will host their own hamfest with the annual Northern Vermont Hamfest at the Milton High School in Milton, Vermont. More information can be found at the club's website, www.ranv.org.

The club also produces an award-winning monthly newsletter for Ham buffs called the *News and Views*. The club often hosts instructional courses to help obtain the licenses

necessary to legally be a ham radio operator.

The equipment needed varies depending on the interest of the ham.

"A VHF radio on two meters to start so you can talk on local repeaters, on mountain tops. Once you learn Morse Code you can get a HF high frequency radio that skips off the earth's ionosphere and can get all over the world," Gayet said. "Hams use a variety of communications including phone, CW and other digital modes such as RTTY, which is the old radio teletype, but can now do it much quieter on a computer screen."

The club, which is more than 10 years old, meets the second Tuesday of every month at 7 pm at the O'Brien Civic Center in South Burlington, Vermont.

"A ham comes in and gives a talk about a

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—Club President Paul Gayet



photos courtesy of RADIO AMATEURS OF NORTHERN VERMONT

Above: Demo station, operating on SSTV, APRS and as a Packet Node. Below: A Radio Amateurs of Northern Vermont club member working during the Annual Field Day.

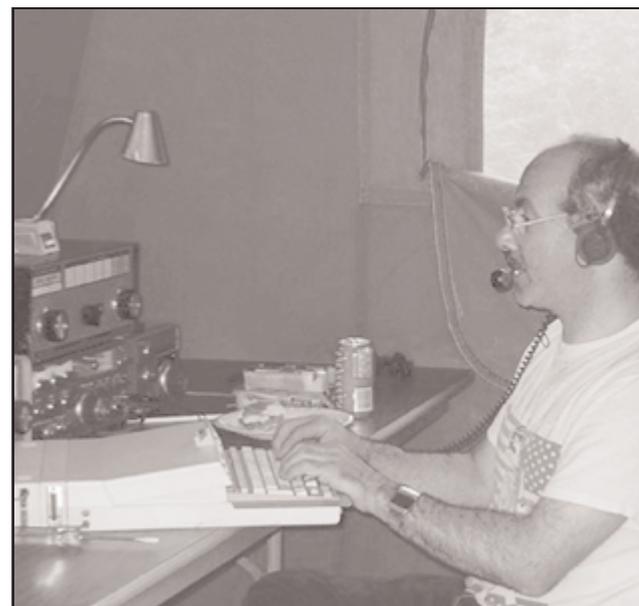
technical, but fun, topic to educate us and get a fun dialogue going," Gayet said. "We also have occasional guest speakers which can include official local agencies. For example we had the border patrol come in talk about their communications."

"It was a very fun and lively time," Gayet continued. "When 911 first came out, a state representative came up to talk to the club on it."

The club has 100 members mainly from Vermont, however some people have seen the club's webpage and been so impressed by it that they have joined. Among the states represented in the membership are North Carolina, New Jersey, Wisconsin, and Arizona.

Gayet says that RANV is only one of a handful of clubs in Vermont and New York, however they have the biggest membership in Vermont.

"I find it interesting that you can take the equipment and knowledge you learn through the license procedure and you can get on the air and communicate with people all around the world," Gayet says. "It's all chance in who you'll get unless you



schedule with someone. Otherwise you just don't know who'll you get. There are many things one can do with this hobby."

Interested people are encouraged to join the club at its meetings or through contact available from the constantly updated website www.ranv.org

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