



# Radio Amateur News & Views

The Official Journal of the Radio Amateurs of Northern Vermont

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## “SO NOW YOU ARE A GENERAL?” The March 13<sup>th</sup> RANV Meeting

The March RANV monthly meeting will be a “How-To” tutorial on getting on the air with your newly acquired HF privileges presented by Carl AB1DD, Brian, N1BQ, and Bob KB1FRW. They will distill the reams of information out there down to a simple process to get on the air without breaking the piggy bank.

Brian will concentrate on simple wire antennas that will perform on multiple bands. He will give information on materials, configurations, feed lines, baluns and a bit on tuners. Emphasis will be on locally obtained construction materials.

Carl will discuss rigs, including what’s available, which older rigs to look for and antenna tuners, both inboard and outboard to the rig.

Bob will go into tying it all together with power supplies, running feed lines into the house and making it all work.

The meeting will be Tuesday, March 13<sup>th</sup>. Pre-meeting dinner and festivities will be at Zach’s on Williston Road at 6 PM. The meeting will be at 7 PM at the O’Brien Civic Center, 113 Patchen Road, South Burlington. Hope to see you there.

## MARCH OF DIMES WALK

by John N1LXI

Spring is coming to Vermont and with it the annual March of Dimes walk on Saturday, April 28<sup>th</sup>. Volunteers are needed to provide radio communications for this event. The support net will run from 8 AM to about 1 PM, but there is some flexibility in start and finish times for each of the rest stops. Volunteers at the rest stops would communicate information about the first walker to arrive, status of supplies and other information as needed from the station captain. It’s a great way to spend a morning outside and get some public service experience. If you are interested in helping out with the March of Dimes walk, please contact John N1LXI at 658-0690 or [jrclyft@comcast.net](mailto:jrclyft@comcast.net).

## CLASSES AND VE SESSION

Next week, March 17-18<sup>th</sup> is the weekend Technician and General ham radio class. This is the last chance to attend a class until the fall. Jump in and get that upgrade now that code is gone. And drag a friend to class Saturday so they can get their Technician! Details on the class are on the RANV web: [www.ranv.org](http://www.ranv.org). Contact Mitch for enrollment details.

There will be an exam session on Saturday and Sunday night after class at 6:00. The session is open to candidates only who register in advance by Friday, March 16<sup>th</sup>. Walk-ins will not be permitted. Contact Mitch at [w1sj@arrl.net](mailto:w1sj@arrl.net) if you wish to register.

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## OUR LAST RANV MEETING

by Carl AB1DD, Sec'y

The February 13<sup>th</sup> meeting found us back at our regular meeting place at the O'Brien Civic Center. President Brian N1BQ called the meeting to order at 7:15. There were 25 members and guests present. First on the agenda were announcements. Mention was made that starting February 23<sup>rd</sup>, Morse code tests would no longer be given. There will be no more excuses not to upgrade.

There is almost always bad news, and this time it was real bad. Hosstraders is no more. The folks that have run it are moving on to other things and will not name a successor.

Next up was some discussion on the upcoming hamfest in Milton. People were found or volunteered to fill a few openings such as the front door and back door guards, and bodies to get some tables and set up on Friday night.

After Brian N1BQ was chosen to bring snacks in March, we went around the room and did introductions.

Fritz Raab, W1FR was introduced. He did a presentation on the experimental work that is currently ongoing on the frequencies around 510Khz. Fritz is heading up the group that is exploring the possibilities of using these frequencies for close-in communications during emergencies. He told of the history of the band, as it was a marine distress frequency back in the old days. He is also looking into the possibility of making the band into a ham band. We are lucky to have people in Vermont that are in the ham radio limelight.

The meeting ended around 8:45, and we adjourned to the snack room.

## THE PREZ SEZ

by Brian N1BQ, President

The hamfest has come and gone and from the looks of it, it went well. Attendance was about the same, which is OK, but many people stayed a lot longer, which is good!

We now have a lot of new Generals. This coming meeting, Bob, Carl, and I will be giving a tutorial detailing the steps to getting an HF station on the air and basic operating courtesy and practices. So now what? Where do you take it from here?

Let me pose one thought. For me, going all the way back to 1961 when I was first licensed, ham radio was all about learning electricity and electronics. I was the scourge of the garbage men of Lynbrook, New York. I was up early on trash day and out and about with my bicycle to find a TV set being junked, hoping to get back with my father and his car to get it before they did. (They were big honkers back then!) There were commercial rigs then but they were priced way beyond a high school freshman's allowance level so we built with scavenged parts. My first transmitter was a 5-watt 6L6 keyed power oscillator (*audio amplifier tube*) on 80 meters. Many local hams knew me long before I got to the "de WN2YKL" by the chirp in that miserable rig.

Time moved on and we had the no-code Technician license with VHF privileges. Today's 2-meter hand-helds are small, compact and oh-so-complex and are well beyond the average ham's ability to fabricate, so most Technicians did very little building. A J-pole here, a beam there, VHF antennas are economical and simple to build, and that seemed to be the limit of it. On the other hand, HF rigs, even on SSB are

considerably less complex to build and now that many more hams have or will have HF privileges they now have the incentive to try to build some equipment and learn even more about what is going on in their hobby.

The ARRL recently held a "Homebrew Challenge." The results aren't in, but an entry by Steve Weber, KD1JV, from New Hampshire has already created quite a stir. It's a 6-watt 40 meter CW/SSB rig kit. Using all through-hole parts, it's being offered by Doug Hendricks QRP Kits for \$100 ([www.qrpkits.com](http://www.qrpkits.com)). When I passed Amateur Extra, several years ago, and really started to get into HF, I built a similar rig for 20 meters from Small Wonder Labs in Connecticut. The process taught me a lot and the rig was a lot of fun.

There are many directions to go and this is just one of them.

### Contacting RANV

In Person: Meeting, March 13, 7pm,  
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Please send submissions for the newsletter to the editor, W1SJ.

# MILTON HAMFEST - ANOTHER GREAT YEAR

by Mitch WISJ

We had another fun day at the Milton Hamfest and it was a great one, yet again. Early on, we had a couple of potentially “good” problems as both parking spots and tickets became scarce. These gave the indication of monster attendance, but in actuality, it was really a shortage of these particular commodities. For those of you like the school teacher in me who needs to take attendance and count heads, the highly politically polished official attendance figure is 421. This is essentially and statistically the same attendance we have had for the last 5 years. There are two comments on this. *1. This is great – we have held the line despite every other hamfest losing attendance. 2. This sucks – we haven’t grown in five years.*

For your entertainment, a graph of Milton attendance over the years is shown. It is interesting because it closely approximates the price of a stock which I formerly held (*and recently sold*). We had our boom years in the late 90’s reaching up to 700 people and causing concern as to where to move the show to since we were out of room. Well, that problem is solved! If we were to lay attendance figures of most other hamfests over this graph, we would likely see the same peak, except that where we have attempted to level out, they have continued to nosedive. The hamfest formerly known as Hosstraders fits in this category.

More importantly, over the last 5 years, we have reinvented the Milton Hamfest. The show was first and foremost a flea market and everything else had a bit part. This is no longer true. So while the attendance hasn’t grown, the number of hours which people spend at the hamfest has. So we could possibly claim a higher number of “ham-hours” than most other hamfests.

And speaking of the flea market, it wasn’t all that shabby. All of the

tables looked filled. All three new equipment vendors claimed good sales. One complaint was that there wasn’t enough time to set up all the sale items, an issue I will try to rectify next year.

Somewhere, somehow, I managed to produce a forums program which inspired people to show up. Setting up the forums program is like setting up the entire club meeting programs for a year in advance! This year, we had the challenge of using a different venue because the school closed off our usual forums hang-out. Fortunately, this worked out better than anyone had anticipated. The rooms were more spacious and located right near the flea market. I counted 35+ people for Ed Hare’s Antenna Forum at 8:30. A couple of hours later, John had packed in just under 50 for his talk on Emergency Preparedness and this just might be a new attendance record! The total forum attendance was right around 200, which is HALF the hamfest attendance. This certainly emphasizes how important the forums have become.

Our open demonstrations have been gaining in importance over the years. This year we brought in something new – D-Star, something old – Morse code and something familiar – IRLP. There appeared to be crowd around the D-Star setup all day.

And then there was the VE Session. Coming on the heels of Morse code going away, I was planning for an all out assault. However, after doing on-line surveys, I felt that we had the situation under control. The morning administrative VE session went like clockwork as 10 applicants were processed in only 25 minutes. Then I happened to walk by the Library at 11:30, a full 30 minutes before the VE session and it was completely FULL. I instantly became nauseous. At 11:58 when Ted came to get me to do the exam, my comment was, “I wanna go home!”

The next two hours were a blur of white and buff colored paperwork. I’m not sure who upgraded to what or why and the only thing I have a clear recollection of was howling at couple of folks who didn’t have exact change for the test fee. Amazingly we processed 39 people and 42 exam elements in 2 hours. The session totals were 49 applicants, 43 upgrades and out of those, 8 new licenses. To understand how well we handled the crush, the national VE system, whether it be ARRL or W5YI, has gotten so backlogged that licenses haven’t been issued after 1 full week.

In the “we couldn’t have done it without you” department, thanks goes out, firstly to the hardworking VE staff: AA1SU, AB1DD, K1EUH, K1HD, K1QC, K1RED, KD1R, KM1Z, N1PEA. Thanks also to the door and table people: AB1DD, K1JCM, KB1LIF ND1H, W1DEB, W1SLR and W4YFJ. Debbie has become the first person attendees see each year. It may come as a surprise that going to hamfests is not high on her list. She does like collecting money, though. Our entertainment came from N1YD and KB1KPO on the demonstrations and AA1SU, K1KI, K1TWF, KB1LYU, N1BQ, N1GBB, VE2EQZ and W1RFI at the forums. Most the group listed above had a hand in setup, takedown and table wrangling as well.

So while we have had a successful Milton Hamfest, as an organizer, I know full well that just like in sports playoffs, success in the previous year doesn’t mean a whole lot next year. And this means we start all over again next year. It also means that everyone “owns” the Hamfest and keeps feeding suggestions and ideas all year long so that we continuously make those little tweaks to make the show better.

## REPEATER NEWS

by Mitch WISJ

Many have you might have noticed that the repeater is not doing so well. Last Thursday, as March came roaring in, the repeater got very sick. It was virtually as deaf as post and the output was lagging along. "Oh my God", I thought, "we lost the antenna!" I got home, ran some tests, and all of a sudden, everything was fine. Then Friday morning, it got sick and I did a few more things and it was fine. And then it stayed sick.

So what went wrong? The output was down 20 dB, consistent with the power amp being off. That ¼ watt from the exciter certainly covers a BIG area! But the receiver was useless, being 50 dB down. In layman's terms, 50 dB means a power change of 100,000, or to be blunt, a disconnected antenna. But how was the transmitter working, which uses the same antenna? I started to focus on the preamp, which if dead, would explain the situation. The current diagnosis (*best guess*) is that the 13.8 volt supply is cut off from the amplifier and preamp, but is fine going to everything else. And then there is a 30 amp fuse strategically in that line. It would be nice if it is only a fuse!

But, getting there is 90% of the job. Since the problem came along, we have had snow showers, high winds, frigid temps and more high winds. Being outside this week has been highly uncomfortable. On the mountain, it is downright dangerous. I hope to get up there Saturday, when the weather calms down. In the meantime, the repeater is receiving from a location in Essex and transmitting from the mountain on low power. It's not great, but it works OK for mobiles in the Burlington area.

## UPGRADES, UPGRADES!

by Mitch WISJ

At the giant Milton VE session, 8 RANV members took advantage of the relaxing of the Morse code requirements to pick up upgrades. To Extra: Mark W1MAD and Todd W1TAM. To General: Bob KB1FRW, Barb KB1LIF, Jon KB1MAQ, Scott KB1NDT, Ron KB1NPF and Ron N1LDT. In many of these cases, the exams were taken some time ago and CSCE's were exchanged for licenses!

Of RANV's 120 members, 40 or 33% hold Extra class licenses. This is almost double the Vermont percentage of 18%. RANV has smaller percentages of Technicians, 37% compared to 49% statewide. The other classes match up similarly between the club and statewide totals.

Based on talk I'm hearing about test taking plans, our numbers of Extra Class licensees will increase over the next few months, and will likely approach 50%. Of course, the bottom line is not what your license class is, but what you do with it. We can only hope that great things will come from this.

## FUTURE OF THE NEWSLETTER

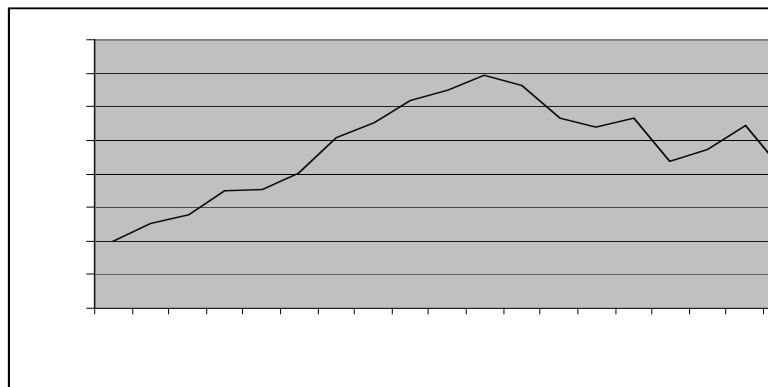
by Mitch WISJ

As you might have read here a few months ago, I am unwilling to write the entire newsletter. To keep things running along, I will try one more idea. If it works - fine. If it doesn't work, then I stop writing.

Each month, I need a different volunteer to write an article about their ham radio experiences. This shouldn't be too hard to do since all those new upgraded General class operators are burning up the airwaves. *Hint, hint!* The article can be about anything ham radio related - on-air, off-air, technical, funny, serious, etc. The article must be feature length - 1 page or 700-900 words. I don't care about grammar or spelling, as long as I can make out what you are trying to say. The deadline is the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month prior to publication (*i.e. April 15<sup>th</sup> for the May issue*).

I need to have a list of people and promised deadline dates to make this work. Simply send me an E-mail with your callsign and which issue you are writing for. If I get multiple articles for the same month then that is good news. I will simply space them out so we always have something for the lean months. If I don't get enough, then there will be no newsletter.

Please consider presenting us with some important input. Who knows - your article may inspire someone to get on the air!



Milton Hamfest Attendance Through the Years

# HOSSTRADERS IS DEAD - WHAT'S NEXT?

*editorial by Mitch WISJ*

Hosstraders is no more. The news appeared suddenly and traveled at shockwave speed. Within an hour of the posting, attendees way down at the Orlando Hamfest knew the story. It was like a close friend passed away.

Perhaps this eulogy is unnecessary. I have learned that there are folks actively working to reserve space at a nearby fairgrounds on the traditional weekend and raise Hosstraders from the ashes. If they can pull it off, that's great. However, knowing the details and complexity of a show of this size, I have serious doubts. But I'll keep the date open.

We all need to take heed because this is the proverbial warning shot across the bow. For years, I and others have utilized the well-worn saying, "use it or lose it". As more and more people relegate amateur radio to the back seat, as amateur radio has become very unimportant, then in turn, the folks who make the events happen will find other things to do. I don't know the exact details why organizers Norm, Bob and Joe decided to throw in the towel at this particular time. There seems to be an indication that the venue was causing problems with dates, price or other conditions. But high on the list is the attendance which has been steadily dropping for the last 10 years. Make no mistake about it; Hosstraders was a big show, the largest in New England. But no one could ignore the fewer and fewer vendors and fewer and fewer attendees each year. Statistically, at that rate, the show would have withered to nothing after a number of years. And that is why the organizers mentioned that they wanted to go out on a high note.

Fortunately, after a drop in the wild days of the mid-90's, the attendance at the Milton Hamfest has leveled off. To do that required changing the focus of the show and still requires a continuous and tremen-

dous amount of PR energy from me each year. There will come a time when I will run out of that energy, just as the Hosstraders organizers have, and if someone else doesn't step up, Milton will go away, too.

At the Milton VE session, we saw almost 50 people cram in to mostly upgrade their licenses. The 8 new hams created at that session was average. In my ham classes, the number of people in the Technician class is below average. True, there has been a jump in the number of new hams in the last week, but this is a bump which is riding along with the upgrades. The truth is that we are not growing. More licenses expire each year than new hams come in to replace them. This has been going on for the last 7 years.

More importantly, very few people get on the air. The activity on the repeater, outside of the hamfest traffic, has been way down over the last 6 months. Activity on other repeaters has been virtually nil. And there haven't been a lot of Vermont stations on HF either. True, there have been several new upgrades burning up the HF airwaves lately, but they are a minority of the 35 folks who upgraded last week.

For some reason, the lure of getting on the air has been lost. I know that 50%, that is, HALF the people who get their license at my classes never get a radio. I've learned that this statistic is consistent in other areas as well. I find this very strange. Why did these people want to get their license if they show zero initiative to even procure equipment? When I took my test for amateur radio, it was a long, torturous 4-week wait for the license. And when it came, wild horses couldn't keep me away from the radio. And while that youthful exuberance has been tempered by 38 years on the air, I always feel that spark I first had when I call CQ and somebody comes back to me.

But at Field Day, when we wrangle people to get on the GOTA station, many have that look of someone going to the executioner. They make a few contacts and run away, like they have been saved from death. Not everyone is like this, but enough people certainly look so uncomfortable on the air that it raises deep questions.

In RANV, we have an overly large number of higher class licensees – 72 out of 120. Yet, when I count up all of the members who I know have operated at all in the last 6 months, I can't find more than 30. That is a commendable number and it is probably better than clubs all over the country. But is it LESS than HALF. And when you consider that the most active hams are members of the club, it points to the fact that only a small percentage of people are actually getting on HF. That coupled with the lack of activity on VHF spells one thing – we are not all that active.

Everyone likes to point fingers and blame the Internet, blame E-bay or blame cell phones for the downturn, but it is clear that the blame lies with no one else but us. Try this exercise. Tally up the number of minutes last week you spent on the air, on your cell phone and on your computer (*not counting work*). Did amateur radio come in dead last? For most people it would. See the problem?

If this hobby holds any value for you, then you should be a practitioner and not a spectator. We don't need folks talking about the good ole days – we already have an abundance of that. We need to be out there operating. Find whatever time you can in-between everything else you do and steal a few minutes to make a contact. And by putting what we preach about into action we will excite others to get their licenses and get on the air as well.

**NEXT MEETING:**  
**“So Now You Are A General”**  
**Tuesday, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 7 PM**  
**O’Brien Civic Center**

**RANV**

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