



# RADIO AMATEUR NEWS & VIEWS

The Official Journal of the Radio Amateurs of Northern Vermont

NOVEMBER 2008

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## CONNECTING TO YOUR RADIO The November 11<sup>th</sup> *RANV* Meeting

In past presentations we have looked at controlling radios through built-in computer interfaces. Brian N1BQ is back for our November meeting where he will offer some insight into giving commands to and getting information back from your radio. It will be a combination lecture and demonstration

We will look at basic interfacing techniques using switching transistors for turning power on/off, keying a CW transmitter, putting the radio into transmit, running the up-down buttons and turning on/off various features. We will look at ways to get audio into and out of the radio for encode/decode of data or control signals. We all know how interconnecting differing systems can often cause problems with ground loops so we will investigate isolating ground systems using simple transformers and opto-couplers.

What can you do with all of this? How about a CW keyer for beacon operation? Or else, try a digital interface to your computer to remotely control your equipment. Or else, add a DTMF decoder for an emergency repeater shutdown in case the main controller goes south. A nice touch would be to set up a spare receiver at home to allow you to turn on your yard lights via a control sequence from your radio when you arrive home late at night.

The goal of the presentation is to show you the basics and the possibilities with an eye towards a construction night in February or March where you can try your hand at building one of these interfaces.

## ELECTIONS

Pursuant to the By-Laws of the *RADIO AMATEURS OF NORTHERN VERMONT*, enclosed in this month's newsletter is your ballot for election of officers. Families receiving one newsletter will receive the correct number of ballots.

Nominations for officers come from the membership, or (*much of the time*) people are asked to run. We have found one candidate for each office. However, any club member in good standing, who agrees, can be written in.

Brian N1BQ, Bob KB1FRW and Carl AB1DD have agreed (*or have been suitably coerced*) to continue as President, VP/Treasurer and Secretary, respectively.

Please show your support for our officers by voting. Either bring your ballot to the meeting, or vote by E-mail.

## COMING UP!

This Fall is Contest Season. There is no better way to sharpen your skills than to operate in the **ARRL Sweepstakes**. This is much more than a 59VT contest. You have to send all sorts of information and send it correctly. The Phone SS is November 15<sup>th</sup>. The phone affair has become the premier competition in Vermont and many high scores come from right here! You can get on with a 100 watts to a dipole and work lots and lots of stations, all the while, picking up valuable skills.

The *RANV* Holiday Party will be Tuesday, December 9<sup>th</sup> at the QTH of W1SJ/W1DEB. The format will be similar to previous years. Some food will be provided and the rest will be pot luck. **Please let Mitch know your attendance plans by December 2<sup>nd</sup>**. Any other ideas for food or activities is always appreciated.

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## OUR LAST *RANV* MEETING

by Carl ABIDD, Sec'y

The October meeting of *RANV* was called to order at 7:12. There were 20 members in attendance.

After a round of introductions, upcoming meetings were announced. November will introduce a construction project that will continue at a later meeting. Also, annual elections will be held.

Next, Sam N1PDL talked about needing communications help for a national military organization that will be having a reunion in Colchester in August, 2009. Hams will be needed to help coordinate the event. More information will follow.

Bob W4YFJ talked about the Simulated Emergency Test (SET) that will be held on October 25<sup>th</sup>.

Mitch W1SJ reported that the first Get On the Air last Sunday was a success. Get on the 145.15 repeater on Sunday evenings between 6:30 and 9 to find activity.

Mitch also talked about the Vermont Winter Hamfest in February. Mitch needs help, please contact him and volunteer to make this event successful.

Paul, AA1SU was volunteered to bring snacks to the November meeting.

The main topic of the meeting was Electricity 101. Mitch, W1SJ gave a presentation on electricity and how to be safe. Points touched upon included electrical safety, fire safety, things which can go wrong, wiring from the building entrance to the outlet, wiring codes, and wire sizes and type. The most important point: don't try to do something with electric wiring if you don't know what you are doing. It only takes 50 milliamps to kill!

After that warning, the snacks were served. The meeting finished up 9:16.

## SS RAMBLINGS

by Mitch W1SJ

I decided to enter the CW Sweepstakes last week. Unlike SSB which I can copy in my sleep, CW is still a foreign language to me. I can handle myself at 25-30 words per minute, but it requires a lot of energy and my accuracy is, let's say, not so good.

I had a wedding to go to Saturday night, so that meant this was going to be a less than serious effort. And I approached this weekend with much trepidation after getting my butt kicked in this same contest last year, finishing a paltry 3rd in Vermont!

After losing 4½ hours of prime time, I got back on and had some great rates on 80 meters. Usually, I go down for a nap around 4 AM, but the rates were still good and I stayed on right through the morning. In fact, I managed to log the full 24 hours by not taking any breaks until right at the end. I'm not sure of the wisdom of this move, as I was extremely tired and got quite stupid as the contest wore on Sunday. I think my accurate copying speed dropped to around 15!

But it was a good contest as I broke 1000 QSO's and got my first ever clean sweep on CW. I'll probably lose half the contacts due to miscopies!

The highlight of the CW weekend was on Monday when I received a package from the ARRL. It was a plaque for top New England score in the 2007 CW Sweepstakes, Assisted category! It felt silly to be acknowledged for what I thought was a lackluster effort, but at least I picked the right category to operate in!

With no-code in effect now, there is a perception amongst many newer hams that CW is dead. That is far from the truth as thousands of hams take part in CW contests. There is nothing like CW to pull weak signals out of noisy band!

## GET ON THE AIR

by Mitch W1SJ

We have had four weeks of the *Get On the Air* activity night on 145.15. The first couple of nights were well attended, but activity seems to be falling off recently. I will send no more E-mail reminders - everyone is on their own!

The whole point of being a ham radio operator is to operate! This is an opportunity to concentrate everyone on the air at the same time, so don't pass up the chance. Make sure to drop in on the 145.15 MHz repeater every Sunday night sometime between 6:30 and 9:00 and be sure to put your call sign on the air if you do not hear activity.

Better yet, make a habit of monitoring the repeater whenever you are home or in the car. There is a knack for setting the volume so that it doesn't disrupt other activities yet you can be aware of radio activity. You never know when someone will call for help. It would be a shame if such a call went unanswered.

### Contacting *RANV*

In Person: Meeting, November 11, 7pm,  
O'Brien Civic Center  
113 Patchen Rd, So. Burlington  
By Mail: PO Box 9392,  
So. Burlington, VT 05403  
By Radio: 145.15 repeater  
WW Web: <http://www.ranv.org>  
President: Brian N1BQ 899-4527  
n1bq@wulfden.org  
VP/Tres Bob KB1FRW 434-2517  
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Editor: Mitch W1SJ 879-6589  
w1sj@arrl.net

Please send submissions for the newsletter to the editor, W1SJ.

# A NEW VERMONT HAM RADIO SHOW!

*by Mitch WISJ*

**MILTON HAMFEST IS DEAD.** It was a great 25 year run and now it's done.

Out of the ashes of Milton is a new show: **Vermont Ham-Con**, February 28, 2009 at the Hampton Inn at I-89 Exit 16.

## **Why the change?**

Simply put, the Milton School District does not want to make any space available this year to ANY outside organizations. They are putting new procedures in place and want to take many months to perform all of the necessary bureaucracy (*my words*). They are willing to have us back the year after next, at a much higher price. They don't care that we have a 25 year history with them. In addition, dealing with school officials in the last few years has become more and more difficult. As we are not a school function, they don't really care, no matter how positive a community event we think we are.

## **What was considered?**

When we were made aware that the location was no longer available (*mid-October*), we considered many different options. First we looked at whether we wanted to do any sort of Hamfest any more. With falling hamfest attendance all over country and the economy in the tank, no one is super optimistic about setting attendance records next year. When we decided that we wanted to continue with the hamfest, we then looked at different options as to what kind of location we wanted to move the hamfest to.

## **Why Hampton Inn?**

We were looking for a location right off I-89 near Exit 14 or 16. This would create a location close to the population density and also make it very easy to reach for those who travel longer distances. We looked at a couple of other schools, but the price they wanted was quite high.

For a bit more money, we will be getting a class convention venue at a location which cannot be beat. Hampton Inn is within 4 miles of the 5 largest ham radio communities in Vermont.

## **What is the facility like?**

We will essentially have the same amount of room. However, all of the rooms are quite close to the entrance with no long hallway to walk down. The forum rooms are larger and a lot more comfortable. The flea market will be in a ballroom which has access to the outside and to power. For those traveling, rooms are available on site at a special convention rate.

## **What changes are planned?**

The format of the show will be similar to past years. There are a number of things on the wish list. First, we would like to have more forums and run a bit longer into the afternoon, but only if attendees care to embrace that plan. We would like to try to get some amateur radio manufacturers to the show. We are working towards streamlining the door prize procedures to make it easier to claim prizes. Finally, we would also like to have vendors and forums from the ranks of commercial and professional communications entities to give everyone a broader view of the technology we are in.

## **Will there be food?**

We don't know if we can arrange for the hotel to provide a food service right at the show. However, there is T-Bones next door, and McDonald's and Friendly's across the street and Shaw's and Costco within walking distance. It is unlikely anyone will expire due to lack of food.

## **What are the downsides?**

Cost! This shindig will cost 3 TIMES what we used to pay. We probably could have found an inex-

pensive location off on a side street, which would be hard to find and would have all the ambience of a warehouse. However, good locations cost money and we decided to do this right. We will bump up the price a little bit to offset some of the added cost. More importantly, we are depending on everyone in the ham radio community to embrace this show so that it survives. Needless to say, if the attendance is poor, this show will not happen again and there will be no hamfest or ham radio convention.

## **Why the Name Change?**

"Milton Hamfest" isn't really appropriate. And, "the hamfest formally known as Milton" just won't do. "Colchester Hamfest" – ugh! We could use our official name, "Northern Vermont Winter Hamfest", but that 8-syllabus monster would not be all that helpful in seeking publicity. And it doesn't address the fact that we are the ARRL Vermont State Convention. So we have tagged the name, "Ham-Con". These two syllables tell all that this is a convention of hams. It is then left to the imagination to decide if these are talking hams or baked hams. There is a "Ham-Con" in California, but I sincerely doubt that anyone would mix the two shows up!

## **What should I do?**

First of all, adopt the correct attitude. This isn't Mitch's hamfest or **RANV's** hamfest. **THIS IS YOUR HAMFEST**. Treat it as such. Do the following:

1. Come to the Hamfest. You know the date, now make plans
2. Bring other hams, family and friends with you
3. Tell all hams and teekie people you see about this show
4. Provide feedback to us! What forums, what demonstrations, what kind of set up etc. The goal is for you to have a great time. Let us know how to do that!

# USING E-MAIL

by Mitch WISJ

Amateur operators depend a lot on E-mail for communications, despite the fact that we are supposed to be the radio communications experts. I get a ton of E-mail for work and other pursuits but most of my E-mail is ham radio related. We use E-mail to plan all club events and heavily use it to plan crucial activities such as the Vermont City Marathon.

Sadly, most people are very poor users of E-mail. Despite the power of the system, it has been abused to the point where it is of limited usefulness. And I am not talking about the abuse by spammers. Instead it is our own misuse which makes E-mail that much less effective. It is my hope that by pointing out some of the issues, we will all be better users.

The primary problem with many E-mail users is that they don't understand about two-way communication. Two-way communications involves an exchange of mail in a reasonable time frame. If you are one of those users who only check their E-mail once a week, then please don't use E-mail! By doing this you waste everyone's valuable time! When I send an E-mail message, I assume (*often wrongly*) that everyone will read it in a day or two. If you read it in a week or two, the time value is reduced to zero. I might as well have mailed you a letter instead! If you are going to use E-mail and make your address known, then get into the habit of checking your mail at least once a day. For those with work E-mail addresses, I assume most will only read their mail during business hours, and I allow for this. However, you should explore ways to get your work E-mail when you are not at work. So, if you cannot check your mail daily, then simply indicate that you have no E-mail so we all don't assume that we have communication.

When you give out your E-mail address, use one address and one address only! And make sure that address is encoded as your reply address on all E-mails you send out. I have some 7 E-mail addresses I deal with for various reasons, but the only address I give out (*to legitimate people*) is w1sj@arrl.net. I use my other addresses for entities on the web which seem questionable. No matter which one of my E-mail addresses I use to send mail, w1sj@arrl.net always appears as the return address.

When I send an E-mail to people, I usually expect an answer. The only time I don't expect nor desire an answer is when the message deals with an announcement of an upcoming event. Letting a message sit in your inbox to age like fine wine is not a good way to communicate. All messages should be dealt with immediately. If you do not know the answer, then acknowledge the E-mail and answer it a day later. But answer it! If you find hundreds of E-mail in your inbox and cannot deal with that, tighten up your spam filters and unsubscribe from all reflectors. Shut the unimportant mail off unless you can read it all in a reasonable time frame.

Another big problem with E-mail is that folks do not understand how to personally communicate. The rule is simple: If it doesn't concern me directly, then don't send it to me, unless I have asked for it. I get tons of mail directed to large lists about things I really don't care about. Don't do that. Direct personal mail to me only. When replying, NEVER NEVER click on "reply to all". By doing that you become a nuisance for those folks who are not directly involved in the discussion. I make a point to limit large mailings to events of universal importance (*such as the Hamfest and Field Day*), which ends up being 2-3 messages of this type a year.

Another E-mail problem is copying everything I sent to you back to me. Don't do this! I know what I sent to you since I keep copies of all messages. When you send me a one word answer embedded in a whole bunch of stuff which is copied back, I often do not find what you said. When replying, hit "Ctrl-A" to highlight everything and then hit "Delete". And all that stuff goes away and you have a clean slate to write on. And then I might be able to figure out what you are talking about.

Use the KISS principle when sending E-mails. KISS means Keep It Simple Stupid! Write like you are being charged \$1 per word and make your writing clear. I get E-mails which ramble on and often I cannot make out what is being asked or stated. Use proper spelling and the best grammar you can muster. All good E-mail programs have spell checkers – use them!

Be careful what you put in the E-mail. If your message talks heavily about sex, drugs, rock n' roll, gambling and other shady stuff, chances are that my spam filters will take objection and toss the whole thing in the trash. If it looks like spam, smells like spam and tastes like spam, it's..... probably spam!

Be careful of what you put in the subject line. Heavy E-mail users file mail based on the subject line and if it is off topic, it will get misfiled and probably not read. Example: I send you a message with the Subject of "Hamfest" and you reply to it, keeping the same subject line, but ask me about a VE session. That E-mail will likely rattle around my computer until I find it – if I find it.

So please take the time to tighten up your E-mail usage. When used properly, this is an extremely powerful tool which can reach people quickly. When not used properly, it becomes a giant waste of time and the ability to reach people has to fall on the phone system and voice mail.

# OFFICIAL RANV 2008 ELECTION BALLOTS

TWO WAYS TO CAST BALLOT:

1. Deposit in voting box at start of November 11th meeting
2. E-mail to ranv@sover.net **no later than noon Tuesday**. You must include serial number in E-mail

**Do not Mail ballot!**

Write-ins must be: a real living person, a member of **RANV**, agreeable to accepting the office

There are TWO ballots on this sheet for use by family members.

Only ballots with bonafide serial number will be counted.

*VOTE EARLY AND VOTE OFTEN!*



**President**

- Brian Riley N1BQ
- Write In \_\_\_\_\_

**Vice President - Treasurer**

- Bob Allen KB1FRW
- Write In \_\_\_\_\_

**Secretary**

- Carl Dow AB1DD
- Write In \_\_\_\_\_

SAMPLE

**President**

- Brian Riley N1BQ
- Write In \_\_\_\_\_

**Vice President - Treasurer**

- Bob Allen KB1FRW
- Write In \_\_\_\_\_

**Secretary**

- Carl Dow AB1DD
- Write In \_\_\_\_\_

ranv \_\_\_\_\_

ranv \_\_\_\_\_

**CUT HERE!** - otherwise your name will show on the back!

## FIELD DAY RESULTS: **RANV** BLOWS 'EM AWAY!

*by Mitch WISJ*

In our Field Day Report in July, I mentioned that we accomplished what we set out to do and managed to break our own records all over the place. But we didn't know how we compared with other Field Day groups. That information is now published and we put up a tremendous result.

How tremendous? We finished in first place in the 2A category. That is always a good thing, and it doesn't happen often. This is only the 5<sup>th</sup> time we have accomplished this going back to the original IBM Radio Club group who started at that same location in 1984.

We ended up in the TOP TEN of all Field Day groups. That includes groups running 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 and 23 transmitters, plus GOTA and VHF. And we got in there with only 2 transmitters. A 2A group has made top ten only 4 times in the last 25 years! And if we just count contacts, we were 8<sup>th</sup> in the nation!

Our point total was 14,754. This is the highest 2A point total in 15 years. Back in 1993, KP2N in the Virgin Islands hit 15,580, but of course, they used that super Caribbean propagation to do that.

How did this do this? First, we were blessed with good propagation. Many of the top ten scores are from the Northeast. Those long openings on 15 meters and later on 6 meters made a big difference.

While the phone station saw little improvement over the last several years, it has been the tank which has kept

us competitive for lots of years. This year, we added Ed N1UR on CW and his big mutha yagis and that made a big difference. And we got the GOTA station performing at a level never seen before. When a new operator who has never seen a radio previously can hold 60 QSO's an hour, you know that's special. And finally, 6 meters made an appearance during Field Day in many years and we were there with the equipment and operators to take every bit of advantage.

And, I know that we all had a blast of a time and setup and take down wasn't too stressful. Field Day 2008 will be the new benchmark that we will have to compare all future efforts to and it is not too long before we start planning for 2009. Until then, let's all bask in the congratulations and in the knowledge that we did a job which far exceeded expectations.

### FIELD DAY 2008 LOCAL RESULTS

Club	Call	CL	Pts	QSO	Part	Pos	Tot	%
RANV	W1NVT	2A	14754	4779	29	1	442	99
Udder Club	W1MOO	2A	11574	3624	17	4	442	99
SOVARC	K1SV	3A	5242	1758	10	33	303	89
GMWS	N1VT	4A	5716	1468	34	15	109	87
Twin State	W1FN	3A	2604	984	10	133	303	56
WRiver RC	W1RRC	3A	2188	436	36	162	303	47
BARC	W1KOO	2F	1346	246	15	42	75	45
GrMtnBoys	WA1QGC	1AB	955	79	3	11	14	29
Addison Co	N1NRA	1E	338	119	10	150	202	26
RIT RC	K2GXT	3A	1312	382	4	249	303	18

**NEXT MEETING:**  
**“Connecting to Your Radio”**  
**Tuesday, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 7 PM**  
**O'Brien Civic Center**  
**113 Patchen Road, South Burlington**

***RANV***

P.O. Box 9392

South Burlington, Vt 05407

**<http://www.RANV.org>**