



Orange County Radio Amateurs (OCRA) Newsletter February 2008

From the Editor

I'm not sure that I agree with the outcome of Groundhog's Day. The early February weather has been far too nice for me to want to believe that we have six more weeks of winter. The tulips that are coming up in our yard would certainly agree!

Since the weather has been agreeable to outdoor activity, make sure that you take some time to check on your outdoor ham radio equipment. Just in case that pesky groundhog was right, you'll want to have everything ready to operate properly over the next six cold weeks of winter ☺

I hope you enjoy reading this month's newsletter. As usual, there is quite a lot of diverse information for OCRA members. See you at the February meeting.

Now, get comfortable, read your club's newsletter. And, remember to get radio active!

Best regards,

Laurie - N1YXU

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Summary of the January Meeting

The January OCRA meeting was held on Monday, January 14. One of the main agenda items was the election of the 2008 OCRA officers. The OCRA officers and board members are listed below:

OCRA Officers:

- Woody Woodward, K3VSA, President
- Ken Kauffmann, KR4FM, Vice President
- Dan Eddleman, KR4UB - Treasurer
- Laurie Meier, N1YXU - Secretary

OCRA Board Members:

- Justin Heinecke, KD4CPM, One year term remaining
- Gary Pielak, AI4GT, One year term remaining
- Robert Little, N4ZAK, Two year term remaining
- Brian McLamb, KI4YSZ, Two year term remaining

Additional topics from the January meeting include:

- It is that time of year again to make sure that your membership dues have been paid. Dan, KR4UB, or any OCRA officer will be happy to collect your dues.
- Woody, K3VSA, received a letter from the soldier that we have adopted through the Adopt a Platoon organization. The soldier was very happy to receive the package that was mailed and eagerly shared the bounty with other soldiers. Another collection will be happening shortly for an additional package to be mailed. More information will be coming at the February meeting.
- A standing committee has been approved for Field Day. Dave, W4SAR, will be leading the committee. One of the topics at the February meeting will be band captains for Field Day. Blackwood Farm is available again this year for the OCRA Field Day activities.
- A donation of \$100.00 to the Sunrise Church was approved unanimously. OCRA is provided our meeting room free of charge. We traditionally give an annual donation to the church.
- I was very flattered to receive the OCRA cup at the meeting. It is truly a privilege to be part of the OCRA organization and the broader community of amateur radio operators. I am looking forward to a very active year.

- Chris, KG4HNC, shared his homemade 17-15-10 meter antenna with the group. This is an antenna that was described in the May 2007 QST. Chris also shared a kit that he had built in an Altoids can. Congratulations on your 20 meter contact into Oklahoma on 5 watts!
- Thank you to Dave, W4SAR, for his leadership in 2007 and before. Your work is appreciated!
- Tim Slay, N4IB, gave a very interesting and informative update on amateur radio activities. A more detailed article regarding his presentation is included in the newsletter.

The February OCRA meeting will be held on Monday, February 11, at the Sunrise Church beginning at 7:30 pm. The weekly Orange County ARES net meets on Saturdays at 9:30 am local on the W4UNC repeater [442.150MHz with a PL tone of 131.8Hz]. All licensed amateur radio operators are invited and encouraged to check in.



President's QRM

The January 4th edition of the ARRL's website included as its weekly poll the following question: "How healthy is Amateur Radio as we enter 2008?" The three answer choices were "robust and hopeful," "holding its own--no change," and "on the decline." As of the time I'm writing this, over 2,500 responses were tabulated, and the results were:

robust and hopeful = 26.6%

holding its own = 43.2%

on the decline = 30.1%

Over a quarter of respondents thought ham radio was on the down slope, and I can understand why some people might feel that way. Conversely, out of the total of people who responded, almost 70% thought our avocation was either growing or at least holding steady. I, of course, voted for "robust and hopeful," because, as I see it, the diversity of Amateur Radio continues to expand.

Interestingly enough, this ever increasing scope of ham radio might at least be partly responsible for the negative response that almost a third of us expressed on the survey. Used to be, you could operate CW, SSB, or RTTY on a choice of, really, seven bands. Then FM came along. Then the repeater boom happened. If you operated VHF FM, you could usually find other hams to talk with, because most places had only two or maybe three repeaters. Now, there are so many repeaters around that it almost seems like there's at least one repeater for each active ham. Nowadays, you can put your callsign out on a dozen repeaters and have nobody come back. Rather than facilitate communication, we've actually marginalized it by spreading ourselves too thin. With less and less of an opportunity to talk to somebody, are more and more of us responding by switching the radio off?

The same case could be made for digital. Once the FCC approved ASCII on the hambands, we had AMTOR, then PACTOR, then, well, you get the idea. Don't misunderstand; I think diversity is great, but we need to realize that it can lead us to false conclusions about the "health" of our service, and when we act upon these false conclusions by dropping out, they become self-fulfilling prophecies.

What can we do about this as individuals? Well, first, don't get stuck on one mode. Diversify a little yourself! Get on HF, even if it's only the 10M band. Learn Morse Code and build a QRP rig. Hook up that sound card and explore one of the new digital modes or connect to a packet BBS station. By all means, get involved with your local ARES.

Second, get a cheap, used 2M FM rig to be set up in your shack just to monitor 146.52MHz, the national simplex calling frequency. Some people are advocating the use of 2M simplex as a viable alternative to the repeater glut, especially travelers, who'd have to continually switch channels as go from place to place.

And, third, whatever you do, when you hear somebody put out a CQ, answer them, even if you only have time to give them

a signal report and let them know they were heard. Finally, by all means, if it's a newbie to Amateur Radio, send him or her your QSL card. The proliferation of personal computers and quality printers has made it so easy to work up some kind of card that there's no reason for not doing this. If you don't have a computer and cannot afford preprinted cards, then mail the other guy a picture postcard of your town with the contact information penned in. Be the sort of ham that you'd want to meet over the air. Hey, life's short, so ham it up!

vy 73 de Woody K3VSA
2008 OCRA President

Tim Slays 'Em

by Woody Woodward, K3VSA

The January OCRA meeting was blessed with a special guest appearance of Tim Slay, N4IB, the ARRL Section Manager for North Carolina. Tim drove all the way from Charlotte to be with us and give a short presentation on recent activities and goals of the ARRL, and then drove all the way back that same night--quite an undertaking!

Broadband over powerlines (BPL), regulation by bandwidth, and the health and status of Amateur Radio in the US were among the many topics that Tim addressed.

His "day job" with an electric utility gave him a unique perspective to talk about BPL, which has become a concern for us hams due to its potential to create disruptive radio frequency interference. He said that they lose about ten percent of their BPL network every time their area experiences an electrical storm, along with various other technical issues which make running a BPL system much more of a challenge than what had been expected originally.

Tim said that the ARRL's regulation by bandwidth petition was misunderstood by a large number of hams and was accordingly withdrawn. There was no attempt to relegate CW operations to second-class status, but rather to protect it from further encroachment.

He concluded his talk with some demographics on the Amateur Radio community. We're getting older, which most of us already knew from personal experience. And Tim challenged us to remain positive about what we have, use our talents and abilities to serve, and to look for ways to recruit new hams to the fold. All in all, it was an interesting and informative session.

(Attached photo: Tim Slay, N4IB, addresses the Orange County Radio Amateurs at their January meeting. Credit photo: K3VSA)



The Central Park School for Children Ham Radio Club Meetings:

The Central Park School for Children Ham Radio Club meetings for the remainder of this quarter are:

Monday, February 11
Tuesday, February 19
Monday, February 25
Tuesday, March 4
Monday, March 10

We would love to have local Hams come talk to the kids about their favorite topic related to Ham radio or just hang out with us and help. We're working on trying to have regular Tuesday contacts with a school in Illinois, learning Morse code, just getting on the radio and seeing what countries we can make contact with, etc.

We meet from 3:30 until 5:00 pm. You could come for all or part of a meeting! Thanks!

Contact Meg Millard KI4LLL at 357-2379 for more information or to sign up for a specific date.

Meg Millard, KI4LLL
5th grade teacher
Central Park School for Children, Durham, NC

Our Rich Ham Radio Heritage (Number 5 of a Series) by Woody Woodward, K3VSA

January 25th marked the 130th birthday of a radio pioneer who, in his day, was at the technological apex of wireless communications but is all but forgotten now. I'm referring to the Swedish emigrant to the US, Ernst Fredrik Werner Alexanderson, who became an engineer for General Electric in Schenectady and developed a mechanical means of generating continuous wave radio transmissions. Remember that at the turn of the last century, "radio" transmitting was done by means of spark-gaps, which were really extremely wide band noise sources that were totally unsuitable for efficient use of the electromagnetic spectrum, let alone carrying the human voice.

It was known that an alternator generated sine wave alternating currents whose frequency depended on the number of poles on the alternator. Alexanderson perfected alternators that produced hundred kilowatt AC at frequencies up to 100kHz, quite an accomplishment! It was an Alexanderson Alternator that Reginald Fessenden used to transmit the first voice broadcast on Christmas Eve, 1906, and within a few years, Alexanderson Alternators were the rage. RCA's new communications center at Rocky Point, New York was to have a whole host of them, with antenna systems arranged like a compass rose to be in contact with all of the world. Other Alexanderson alternators were built in other countries to complete the network of stations.

If my memory serves me, only two Alexandersons were installed at Rocky Point before they were made irrelevant by the arrival of vacuum tube technology. The behemoth alternators were dismantled and discarded--all but one. The world's only remaining Alexanderson Alternator resides in the town of Grimeton in its creator's original home country of Sweden. Although technically obsolete, it was used by the Royal Swedish Navy during WWII to communicate with submarines.

It still worked perfectly in 1955 when plans were made to finally scrap the machine. However, protests arose from technocultural conservationists, including a number of hams, so it was saved and is still capable of operating. It can be heard on the VLF band from time to time using its original call sign of SAQ. I believe it was fired up last on Christmas Eve. Here is a link to the Swedish website that commemorates this old treasure: <http://www.alexander.n.se/>

Notice the antenna system, resembling a mixture of a power station and a radio station, which is not surprising when you consider that it transmits on 17.2kHz. (And you thought you had trouble finding enough room for an antenna for 80M!)

On January 1st, 2000, King of Sweden Carl Gustaf XVI had a message broadcast from SAQ in which he made reference to and seconded his great grandfather's, King Carl Gustaf V, inaugural message sent from the station on July 2nd, 1925, which "expressed the hope that better communications would strengthen the relations between people and nations." Of course, this sentiment is also one of the aspirations of the Amateur Radio service.

On July 2, 2004, seventy-nine years to the day after its royal dedication, the Grimeton radio station was added to the UNESCO listing of world heritage sites. Amateur Radio station SK6SAQ operates special events from this same location.

In addition to his namesake alternator, Alexanderson did important work with television and facsimile and held over two hundred patents. An active engineer and inventor well into his old age, he passed away on May 14th 1975.

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