

Propagation

Kootenai Amateur Radio Society (KARS) Newsletter

MARCH 2006

More satire for your amateur radio buck

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Amateur Radio: A National Resource

Deep in the fine print of the Communications Act of 1934, (a small portion is now known as the "Part 97 rules"), Congress declared Amateur Radio as a "National Resource". It was recognized that, when all other means of communication failed, amateur radio operators had the "resourcefulness" to get on the air and contact other amateurs.

Now, in 2006, we continue to have the responsibility to manage this national resource, both individually and collectively.

A few ideas for "individual management": Take a ham class / Take the ham license test / Get on the air / Upgrade your license / Build something / Try a new mode / Assist others in getting started. Individual resource management is up to each of us. Yes, it's only a hobby, but we should be enthusiastic about our hobby! ("amateur radio enthusiast" sounds so much better than "just ham"!)

Some ideas on "collective management": Attend KARS meetings / Bring others who might be interested in ham radio / Drop suggestions in the Suggestion Box (or contact a club officer with your idea) / Share your expertise with others / Come to KARS social and operating events. KARS members and club officers will aid all local Hams in collective resource management. We plan to: Continue all the rich club traditions /

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IDAHO QSO PARTY

KARS will participate in the Idaho QSO Party (IQP) contest scheduled for 11 and 12 March 2006. The purpose of this event is to give non-Idaho hams opportunities to contact as many Idaho hams as possible. Plans are being developed for fixed station operation at the Kootenai County Airport, with others operating at alternative fixed locations, and for a mobile station operating from Bonner and Boundary Counties. IQP is sponsored by the Voice of Idaho Amateur Radio Club (VOI). Event details and rules are available on the VOI website at www.voiceofidaho.org. Kootenai County hams are encouraged to join in. Contact Ed Stuckey (ai7h@arrl.net) for information.

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VICE PRESIDENT'S WORD

Did you ever wonder how the heck Idaho still has 95 Novice Class Licensees? Well it turns out there was a time that the Novice license became renewable. But not for long. The old Novice class was a one year non-renewable ham ticket that required a 5 wpm code test and a 25 question written exam. At the end of the term you either upgraded or you were done being a ham. That was the way it was for most of us OT's (Old Timers). It was "upgrade" or get off the "bands." As of the last KARS meeting there were 2,372 "no code" Technicians, 275 Technician Plus licensees, 885 General Class Licenses, 407 Advanced Class and 667 Amateur Extras in Idaho. That's a total of 4,701 licensed hams. Is it any wonder that hams all over the world will kill for a QSL card (confirming a contact) from an Idaho Ham?

Our new ARRL Director, Northwestern Division Jim Fenstermaker (K9JF) just happens to also be our area QSL manager. The way that works is that every ham regardless of class, should have on file with Jim, several 6"x9" SASE envelopes.

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Propagation is published monthly by the KOOTENAI Amateur Radio Society (KARS). The club is located in Coeur d' Alene, Idaho and serves the North Northern Idaho and the Spokane, Washington areas

KARS operates voice repeaters on 146.980 and 444.775 MHz and a packet repeater on 145.510 MHz. KARS normally holds meeting at 1900 hrs, on the second Monday of each month in the Shep Rock Building at the Coeur d' Alene Airport.

Anyone interested in Amateur Radio is welcome to join. Dues are \$12.00 (individual) and \$18.00 for a family membership. Contact the Treasurer (see page 6) to join KARS.

KARS e-mail Directory

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

DATE/TIME	EVENT	LOCATION
13 March at 7 p.m. (Monday)	KARS monthly meeting	Kootenai County Airport (see below left)
20 March at 7 p.m. (Monday)	ARES/RACES meeting	Kootenai County Sheriff's Department
Every Wednesday at 8 a.m.	Donut Day	Rathdrum Super 1 store (on Highway 53)
Second Saturday each Month, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.	NW Traffic Net Coffee Klatch	Old European Breakfast House in Post Falls

Next KARS Meeting:

**Monday, 13 March 2006 at
7:00 p.m. in the Sheprock Building at
the Kootenai County Airport**

Directions to the KARS meeting:

U.S. 95 to Miles Ave. (Miles is about one mile North of Hayden Avenue.). West on Miles to the airport gate. Bear left to the Shep-rock Building. (about 100 yards from the gate).

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

(continued from page 1)

Organize excellent presentations for club meetings / Conduct ham classes / Sponsor accredited volunteer examiners who administer license tests / Organize enjoyable social and operating events during the year.

I am honored to serve as your new club president, and along with all the club officers, look forward to an eventful and rewarding "KARS ham radio club year".

73 to all,
Ed, AI7H

VICE PRESIDENT'S WORD

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If you are lucky enough to work a ham in another state on VHF (2-meters) or on the HF (20 meters) bands, the chances are very good Jim will be holding some QSL cards (a really neat post card type confirmation of a contact) for you. Send the SASE described to K9JF, 10312 NE 161st Ave., Vancouver, WA 98682 to have yours on file. I did when he reminded me, and a few days later got over 50 QSL cards from all over the world dating back several years. I just forgot to do it when I moved up here from Nevada. Most of the QSL cards were from DX stations and county hunters for awards. There was a WAC (Worked All Continents) in there and several more countries on my way to a DXCC (working 100 countries) award from my new Idaho QTH (home address).

But the real message in here, aside from helping our new ham operators to understand some of our *ham-speak*, is to stress the importance of upgrading to new *ham privileges* just waiting around to be used.

(continued next column)

Too many hams are stuck in the *no-code* technician class. The five word per minute Morse code test doesn't look like it will be dropped for now (under Docket 05-235) so the Technician Plus will be renewed for a time but it has very limited HF privileges. So what you need to be thinking about is upgrading to General Class from Technician. KARS is going to help you do it! Here is what you have to do. Take a 35 question exam on Element 3. Get 26 correct and you are good to go. Many questions involve the *band edges* for each HF band. Easy stuff. The Morse code can be learned in about an hour.

Practice sending code for a week, receiving for the next week. The easiest path to a passing score is to copy any 25 characters correctly in row (numbers & punctuation count for 2 characters). Also you'll have 2.5 seconds per character and you've got 5 minutes to do it. Easy! So there you have it. Resolve to upgrade in 2006. Join the ranks of your ham friends and start having some real fun in ham radio. Here is the carrot: General Class operators are authorized to operate on any frequency in the 160, 30, 17, 12, and 10 meter bands. They may also use significant segments of the 80, 40, 20, and 15 meter bands. Check out: <http://www.arrl.org/catalog/lm/>

2nd Vice President (K6SPP) will make it easy for you with his General Class Upgrade Course set for April at NIC. Classes are filling up fast. Sign up today. Call Larry at 762-2548. More next month – N7JU

I WISH THIS WEREN'T TRUE

When NASA first started sending up astronauts, they quickly discovered that ball-point pens would not work in zero gravity. To combat this problem, NASA scientists spent \$12 million developing a pen that writes in zero gravity--you know it as the Fisher Space Pen. The Russians used a pencil. Your taxes are due.

Upcoming VEC/VE Licensing Exams for Our Area

- 09 March (Thursday), 5:00 p.m.; Tidyman's Grocery, 13014 E. Sprague Avenue, Spokane Valley, WA; Contact Mary Qualiteri (AA7RT), 509.991.2192 or aa7rt@arrl.net.
- 18 March (Saturday); By appointment in Sagle, ID. Contact Russ Arndt (AA7XM), 208.265.4534 after 8 p.m. or russell.arndt@verizon.net
- 25 March or 01 April (TBD by needs) by appointment (Saturday); 9:00 a.m.; Coeur d' Alene, ID ; Contact John Hollar (N7JU), 208.765.5470 or n7ju@arrl.net

NEW OFFICERS INSTALLED

The elections are over, and the results are in. The new presiding officers of KARS are as follows:

- President: Ed Stuckey (AI7H).
- First vice president: John Hollar (N7JU)
- Second vice president: Larry Telles (K6SPP).

Linda Chamberlain (N7UTK) and Chris Monroe (N7ZUJ) continue in their positions of Secretary and Treasurer respectively, as do Jim Monroe (N7ESU) and Larry Telles (K6SPP) as Repeater Tech and Webmaster respectively. As if to show that they are human and subject to human frailty, this new axis-of-power decided to retain yours truly as newsletter editor--a blunder of magnificent proportions that they will soon, no doubt, come to regret.

Seriously, however, we (meaning all KARS members) should be *overflowingly* (how is that for an adverb?) grateful to Ed, John, Larry, Linda, Chris, and Jim for their service; and particularly thankful to Linda, Chris and Jim, who agreed to hold down their positions for one more year--as far as I know, this is *at least* the third consecutive year of service in their positions for all three of these people. If truth be known, I suspect that the years of consecutive service is even more than I know for these three people.

I often cannot write without an attempt at facetious or sarcastic humor creeping into the results, but at this moment I want to be completely serious. KARS cannot function without good people contributing their time and efforts. For that reason, the above mentioned people are to be saluted--give them your support and your recognition, especially when something works well within KARS. And, give them the benefit of any suggestions for improvement you have. Even though they have the offices, they don't (no one does) have a monopoly on good ideas.

You can make partial repayment to these good people next year by volunteering to take on one of these positions yourself. That's right--we need others to step forward for future service.

Let me close this section of the newsletter by thanking last year's officers for their service--appreciation to Bob Kesson (K7CGA), Jack McElroy (K7JMC), and Warren Conklin (WB7ECU). Just to make sure you understand the depth of Jack's contribution, he just completed two consecutive years as KARS veep.

If you are in a tolerant mood, see the companion piece in the next column for more election news with a bedeviling attempt at satirical humor. Not recommended for hard-core Democrats, liberal news media members, or other sensitive types.

--the editor

KARS ELECTION FOLLIES

Not many people know the inside story of the recent KARS elections. And, even those who do know will not acknowledge the story I have to tell you.

At first, things were moving along well, and it appeared that there would be a smooth transition in KARS from a 2005 administration to a new 2006 administration. Then, apparently, word of the opening for president and vice president of KARS filtered to the East coast of the U.S. all the way from Kootenai County. This news was more than two erstwhile presidential candidates could take, and each responded in characteristic fashion.

Albert Goar announced his candidacy for president of KARS at a late-night poetry reading on the campus of North Tennessee College of Tonsorial Engineering. It was a convenient venue, as he had been on campus all day anyway, waiting for a cut-rate shave and a haircut (two bits). When word of Goar's announcement got out, the Washington, D.C. press corps contacted certain Kootenai County residents to see what Albert's interest might be. In subsequent conversations, a former KARS member remarked "Everyone knows that you have to be insane to want to be president of a radio club." Upon hearing that, an on-duty cop, who happened to be buying doughnut at the time, responded "That would make Al Goar a perfect fit for the job." Recognizing wisdom when he saw it, the doughnut vendor gave the cop a dozen glazed at no charge.

A last-minute power struggle developed when John Carry responded to Mr. Goar's announcement by declaring his own candidacy for the KARS job, conditioned on two demands. Mr. Carry demanded that he personally, and only he be allowed to count the votes from Ohio, and also demanded that Ran Dather of CBS conduct an investigation of the other candidates. When it was explained to Mr. Carry that only licensed radio amateurs who are members of KARS are eligible to vote, and that Ran Dather is, as a matter of fact, a party hack, a jackass, Mr. Carry changed his demands, to wit, that all residents of his home district be immediately granted amateur radio licenses and be declared members of KARS, and screamed that facts don't matter!

Upon hearing of John Carry's new demands, Al Goar challenged Mr. Carry to a debate on the effects of global warming on HF propagation. In a fit of pique, and with a bit of one-ups-manship, Mr. Carry challenged Mr. Goar to "meet out back and duke it out." Immediately thereafter the two were seen removing their jackets, and loosening up with free-wheeling arm swings and deep leg squats.

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ADVENTURES IN PSK-31

New hams--basic info for you:

For those unfamiliar with this subject, PSK-31 is a digital communications mode often used on the HF (high frequency) bands. Some think of PSK-31 as the modern replacement for RTTY (radio teletype). With either RTTY or PSK-31, the microphone (or telegraph key) and speaker are replaced by a keyboard (which evolved from the typewriter) and display device respectively. The display device could be a teletype printer or a computer monitor. The developer of PSK-31 (Peter Martinez [G3PLX]) intended to create a narrow bandwidth communications mode with capability to "get through" with low power under high-noise HF conditions--and he succeeded admirably. Narrow bandwidth means that lots of signals (i.e., lots of guys and gals "talking" back and forth) can be crowded into a small band of frequencies--an important attribute for the HF bands which are often crowded with people trying to communicate.

I was first introduced to PSK-31 last year at the KARS Field Day event when Jim Monroe (N7ESU) set me up at an existing station way out in the badlands of the CdA National Forest. I made a number of contacts, and really enjoyed the mode. For me, digital modes give me a way to overcome a serious "ham radio" handicap--my bad ears. My hearing is zombie-bad. Not only do I suffer from the normal decline in hearing that accompanies age, but I have a congenital defect which makes understanding speech (or code) difficult when there is competing background noise (which is prevalent on HF).

Determined that I wanted to operate PSK-31 from my home station, I started talking to various veteran hams to see what hardware and software (PSK-31 utilizes a computer and its sound card) worked well for them. I knew what Jim Monroe was using, but I wanted to explore all possibilities before taking the plunge. John Hollar (N7JU) proved to be a goldmine of information and assistance. After due consideration, I purchased a Rascal sound card interface kit from Buxcomm, and downloaded the free Digipan software from a PSK-31 website. I assembled the sound card interface kit, installed the software on my computer, and hooked-up the hardware (HF transceiver, computer, and interface circuit). That is where things got interesting. The interface kit instructions had a wiring error that took some good, old-fashioned troubleshooting to fix--that was probably the most fun I had all year in ham radio! It brought back the good old days for me.

After correcting the wiring error, I got things working, and got on the air one day in a pre-arranged contact with John Hollar.

(continued next column)

Getting on the air in a pre-arranged contact with someone you know is a good way to test a new set-up. It gives you an opportunity to get good feedback from someone you trust. John gave me good signal reports on his end (meaning that my transmitter and sound card encoder were working), and I was able to receive his signals fine, as well (showing that my receiver and sound card decoder were working). John and I continued our contact until we both "heard" a CQ from a ham in the mid-west--John told me to "go for it," so I answered the fellow's CQ. He came right back to me with a good signal report, and we had a good contact with an exchange of station equipment descriptions, local weather conditions and other interesting stuff.

My conclusion: PSK-31 is a great mode--especially for someone like me with hearing problems. But, it is also widely appreciated by those with good hearing for its ability to "get through" when band conditions are not at their greatest. Go for it!

MORSE CODE AND ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

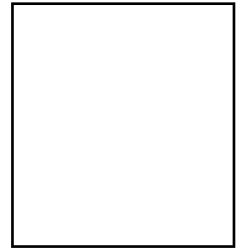
Time to be serious for a moment. Recent medical research has shown that vigorous use of the mind helps stave-off the onset of Alzheimer's disease and other conditions of mental deterioration generally affecting older people. I am not aware of any research directly studying the effects of learning Morse code or using Morse code in susceptible segments of the population, but upon hearing that good things happen to the susceptible group when the mind is exercised, I couldn't help but think that we hams should be using Morse code energetically if we know code, and should be learning Morse code if we don't already know it.

From my own experience, I can attest that learning Morse code and building speed is vigorous exercise for the mind, and that using Morse code on the air is the same. With the possibility that learning and using Morse code is good therapy for those who otherwise might fall victim to Alzheimer's and other deleterious conditions, there is no excuse for someone saying "Morse code--I'm too old to learn Morse code!" It could be that learning and/or using Morse code could keep your brain young.

In fact, if my speculation is correct, the old saying "use it, or lose it" can take on new meaning: "use it (Morse code) or lose it (your mental faculties)." A pox on proposed new rules that discourage learning and use of Morse code. Just remember, if or when it is no longer an HF licensing requirement, it is still an important communications mode, and could be an important asset for keeping your mental powers intact.

--the editor

KOOTENAI AMATEUR RADIO SOCIETY
PO BOX 5222
Coeur d' Alene, ID 83816



Deliver to:

This is the March 2006 Issue.

***New presiding officers for KARS--see details inside.
Survey addendum inside--please complete and bring to meeting.***

Current KARS officers

President:	Ed Stuckey 208-457-0354	AI7H
1st Vice President:	John Hollar 208-765-5470	N7JU
2nd Vice President:	Larry Telles 208-762-2548	K6SPP
Secretary:	Linda Chamberlain 208-765-3144	N7UTK
Treasurer:	Chris Monroe 208-687-2251	N7ZUJ
Newsletter Editor:	Steve McQuiston (semper demens) 208-772-4095	WO6LF
Repeater Tech:	Jim Monroe 208-687-2251	N7ESU
Webmaster:	Larry Telles 208-762-2548	K6SPP

KARS ELECTIONS FOLLIES

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However, nothing was expected to come from this, as it is widely known that John Wayne would never have anything to do with either of them.

Sure enough, when last seen, Mr. Goar was wandering around in the alley out back, continuing with his arm and leg exercises, but Mr. Carry was seen donning a false beard and moustache and exiting the building using a side door.

Thus, the integrity of the election of KARS officers was preserved, and Mistery Stuckey, Hollar, and Telles were swept into power with truth, justice and the American way behind them.

--KARS political correspondent

EXTREME DISCLAIMER

Unless otherwise indicated, the material presented in this newsletter is fully the responsibility of the editor, and does not necessarily reflect the opinions of, nor on the sanity of any other member of KARS.