

North Hills Amateur Radio Club

Tuning in on Fun

by Brittany Angle



Since 1957, "Ham" radio, also known as amateur radio, has become a popular pastime for many residents in the North Hills. The North Hills Amateur Radio Club is a "radio active" club which uses personal amateur radios to make contact with other operators as well as participating in group discussions on the air. Like other clubs across the country, operators can also join in on scheduled on-air meetings. These discussions, called nets or networks, are moderated by a station, or a net reporter. The nets allow operators to learn procedures for emergencies and discuss specific interests shared by the group.

It seems that many of us are unfamiliar with radios, their networks, and how they work. Jim Heiles, club president, therefore sums it up. He says, "A repeater simultaneously receives and transmits your conversation either voice or data. This is accomplished by using 2 frequencies one input or receiving and the other for the output or transmit side. The North Hills ARC has 5 repeaters, 147.09, 146.88, 444.350, which is our D-Star digital repeater, 444.40, and 224.10."

Currently, there are 100 NHARC members who use radio repeaters in order to broadcast over the airways. Radio repeaters are electronic devices that receives a weak or low-level amateur radio signal and retransmit it at a higher level or higher power, so that the signal can cover longer distances. Many repeaters are located on hilltops or on tall buildings as the higher location increases their coverage area, referred to as the radio horizon, or "footprint". Heiles says, "All members purchase their own radios and equipment. This includes base station and mobile radios and antennas as well as power supplies. Hand held or portable radios are also members' expenses."

The NHARC also participates in many community outreach programs. On May 3, 2009, the club participated in the twentieth annual Pittsburgh Marathon, aiding in mile markers, aid stations, and other positions to help the marathon run smoothly. Over 150 volunteers participated in the 26.2 mile course in order to make it a success. Heiles says, "Members also help with the St. Patrick's Day parade, Susan G. Koman Race for the Cure, Diabetes Walk, and the Pittsburgh Vintage Grand Prix. Many members have attended Skywarn training to become severe weather spotters for the National Weather Service. We are members of ARES Amateur Radio Emergency Service, and RACES Radio Amateur Communication

Emergency Service. Members have assisted the Red Cross and Salvation Army with disaster assessments after Hurricane Ivan flooding hit the area in 2004."

The club has a Volunteer Examiner team that administers amateur radio license exams on the second Saturday of the month throughout the year. The tests are held at Northland Public Library at 12 p.m. The club members help those studying for their tests by providing instruction and study materials in advance. The licensing test has takers demonstrate technical knowledge, operating competence, and awareness of legal responsibilities. The club also gives the opportunity to take more advanced radio positions. Heiles says, "There are three classes of licenses for amateur radio operators, Technician, General, and Extra. Morse code is no longer required to obtain a license but is still used. The study guide for each level has a question pool which contains every question that appears on the test and training material is available on-line for purchase."

The North Hills Amateur Radio Club meets as 7 p.m. on the second Wednesday of each month at Northland Public Library. On the fourth Wednesday at St. John's Lutheran Church, the NHARC hold an activity meeting that includes educational information about amateur radio, which is open to the public. Members also meet for a club breakfast on the second Saturday of each month at Reflections Café.

Those interested can subscribe to Static, the club's newsletter to learn more information, club news, and program plans. The NHARC also participates in a Club net, which is open to all amateur radio operators on Tuesdays at 8:30 on 147.09 repeaters to broadcast information for members or followers. Heiles says "The club is for all who are interested in any form of radio communications, shortwave listening, or public service scanning." Additionally, you do not have to be licensed to be a member of the NHARC; however, everyone that transmits on the amateur frequencies must be licensed. Heiles also adds, "We have members that are newly licensed up to AI W3OVZ who has been licensed for 74 years." It seems there is a place for everyone in the NHARC.

For further information visit www.ngarc.org or contact kb3iys@hotmail.com.