


Bopping through the wild blue, Amateur Radio Field Day makes a connection

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By Tammy Wells

June 9, 2021

KENNEBUNK – Interest in amateur, often called “ham” radio began at the turn of the 20th century. It was a way people could talk to each other, across town or across the world.

And although cell phones and other means of communication are very much in use, ham radio remains a popular pastime and a valuable resource.

“It can provide communications when all other systems fail – that has been proven many times during events such as hurricanes, earthquakes, fires, etc.,” said Alex Mendelsohn of the New England Radio Discussion Society. The society will host its annual field day later this month.

On Saturday, June 26, from 2 to 5 p.m., the public will have a chance to meet and talk with local ham radio operators and see for themselves what the Amateur Radio Service is about. The field day will be held at the south

yard of The New School, 38 York St. (Route 1).

On field day folks will see a shortwave radio station capable of world-wide communications. Mendelsohn said the station will use Morse Code as well as voice, and perhaps some computer-generated digital communications. Visitors will see emergency preparedness equipment, makeshift antennas, and meet the operators as they set up and operate a temporary radio station.



The New England Radio Discussion Society will host a field day to which the public is invited 2 to 5 p.m. June 26 outside at The New School in Kennebunk. Above, members Susan Bloomfield and John Nowacki set up at a prior event.

Courtesy photo

During winter storms, spring flooding, tornadoes, wildfires and other events world-wide, amateur radio operators have often been the only people able to communicate, saving lives and property, according to the American Amateur Radio League.

The New England Radio Discussion Society was established in 2010 and began hosting the field day about a year later, said member Susan Bloomfield, who has been licensed by the Federal Communications Commission as a ham operator since 2015.

Bloomfield said she remembers her oldest brother, Donald, building transceivers and other equipment from kits, and stringing wire antennas out his bedroom window to backyard trees.

“He operated from Long Island, New York, where we grew up, contacting hams all over the world by voice and Morse Code,” said Bloomfield. At the time, she said, she watched and listened.

Bloomfield said her brother passed away in 2014, and a year later, she saw an Introduction to Ham Radio class offered through Adult Education in Wells by the Wireless Society of Southern Maine. She enrolled in the course and

became licensed.

“By a special program offered by the Federal Communications Commission, the federal body that grants licenses, I found out I was able to assume Donald’s call sign, WB2UQP,” said Bloomfield. “So, pursuing this hobby is very sentimental to me. I can honor Don by sending out his call sign by voice or Morse Code whenever I am on the air. I particularly do this on his birthday.”

Bloomfield said she was encouraged to become licensed by Maine hams, who also helped her set up her own radio system, and values the friendships formed at the local club.

“I could not have made a better decision than to delve into ham radio, a hobby of lifelong learning,” said Bloomfield.

Mendelsohn became involved in amateur radio as a teenager.

“Many of the kids in the neighborhood at the time were excited about ham radio,” he said. “I had friends in high school who were already licensed, and that was an incentive. I also attended a vocational-technical school, and

radio was a natural extension of that. Indeed, most high schools back in the '50s and '60s had Amateur Radio clubs and school stations.”

He said computers now play a role in ham radio system, providing sites for callsign searches and giving solar-influenced radio propagation reports. As well, ham radio provides a way to study basic electrical theory and apply that to more advanced systems, said Mendelsohn, like amplifiers, receivers, computers, transmitters, and myriad circuits used in an amateur radio ham station.

Recently, the New England Radio Discussion Society facilitated a talk between students at Kennebunk's Sea Road School and Astronaut Michael Hopkins on the International Space Station.

The radio group approached the school and plans were made over many months. Then, on Jan. 21, a link was established between the school and Hopkins aboard the space station. It was transmitted via the internet on a private link to an amateur radio ground station in Italy, where Claudio Ariotti, who uses the call sign 1K1SLD, talked to the space station on the VHF 2-meter FM band and transmitted the signal. The space station did the same, and Ariotti then transmitted the signal back to the school.

“Ham radio can be an eye-opener for kids, and may ultimately lead to careers in various fields of electronics and communications technology,” Mendelsohn said.

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