MERCURY AMATEUR RADIO ASSOCIATION
MARA - NORTH AMERICA - NORTH EAST

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VIEW FROM THE TOP

Way back in the good ole days, communicating inexpensively by wireless usually meant a CB radio. In the world of "Hey good buddy", my husband was known as Foghorn. CBing was okay for a while but then it seemed that everyone on the block had more than their share of saying what they thought needed to be shared and communicating via CB became what I call, less effective.

It was not until 1991 that Barry became acquainted with amateur radio through a customer at his workplace. My husband is an auto technician and, while working on a car one day, he took notice of a radio mounted in the lower center of the dashboard. He took particular notice of the complexity of the face of the unit and he began to ask questions. This individual, Jack (WA2LDD), was very helpful and became his "Elmer". Jack and Barry continued to be very good friends until Jack became a silent key in 2006.

That was the beginning; his interest in ham radio was piqued. The studying for the test to obtain a license began and he became a "no code tech" later in 1991.

But he wanted more. He wanted his General ticket. He passed the written part of the general test but needed to pass the 13-word per minute Morse code section. Now, let me assure you, this was no small feat for him. I can testify that he spent many hours listening to tape recordings over and over again, poised with pencil in hand copying down dits and dahs and forming them into words. Being able to receive code was the requirement for the

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test, but he thought that if he were able to send code he would be able to learn it better, so using an antique straight key that his grandfather had given to him many years earlier, he practiced sending code night after night. All this may not seem to be so important, but the practicing all took place in his "shack" which happened to be in a corner of our bedroom. Trying to sleep with a code key clicking and the floor shaking from nervous foot-tapping late at night was not conducive to falling asleep. But it all paid off! The great day finally arrived when the test was passed! After that came more studying and he now holds the Advanced Class license.

With all this happening it was decided that I, too, would try to obtain my license so we could talk to each other when one of us was away from home. My studying came in the form of memorizing answers from the *Now You're Talking* manual. I'd read one section, read over all the answers and then memorize the correct answers. I memorized all the correct answers in one section before going on to the next. I passed the test for no-code tech, getting only two answers incorrect, in 1996 and have been a ham ever since!

So now the two of us are hams together! In addition to us, two of our sons also have licenses. Our oldest son Todd (KB3HUF) drives for Nestle Transportation and has a 2 meter radio in his truck. He has been licensed for just a little over a year now. It's great to able to talk to him when he is within repeater range. Our youngest son Matthew (N2SJW) got his license while he was in high school. He is also on the road a lot for a private-owned over-size load escort company; you know, those cars and trucks that travel with those huge, over-burdened trucks you see so much on the interstates sporting the "Wide Load" and "Over Size Load" signs. He presently does not have a radio in his car, but his understanding wife spoke with Santa earlier and he should find

a new 2 meter unit under his Christmas tree.

Barry and I have both been involved with R.A.C.E.S. and emergency management on the community, county and state levels. We've enjoyed activities such as helping with fund raisers, working together with the March of Dimes and other charity organizations. For a number of years our local radio club was the kingpin of a local parade in Washington NJ, as we directed the flow of the parade entrants. Barry has been a member of MARA NE for a number of years now and together we have really enjoyed meeting so many wonderful people along the Mid-Atlantic coast and into Canada. The annual meetings are a great time to put names and call signs with faces and personalities. I believe we have missed only one meeting over the past eight or nine years.

I've actually enjoyed writing about how and when our family got into the world of amateur radio. The article has been edited (yeah, right!) by my husband. He is a man of few words and would much rather be behind the scenes instead of being in the limelight. (He informed me that the term "transceiver" should be used in place of radio!)

Sherry Smith – KB2YXI

--- MARA NE ---

TECH STUFF

QSL CARDS – SOME THOUGHTS ON ROLLING YOUR OWN!

You can shell out some $$ and buy commercial or with a little effort on your part, you can design and print your own QSL cards, and perhaps learn some new skills along the route.

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QSL cards have been around for as long as there have been amateur radio stations communicating with one another. The name comes from the Q code "QSL", which means "I acknowledge receipt."

From Wikipedia - "A QSL card is a written confirmation of either a two-way radiocommunication between two amateur radio stations or a one-way reception of a signal from an AM radio, FM radio, or television station. QSL cards can also confirm the reception of a two-way radiocommunication by a third party. A typical QSL card is the same size and made from the same material as a typical postcard, and many are sent through the mail as a standard postcard."

Some are simple in black ink with just the basic information required, rubber stamped or self-printed on ordinary card stock; others are works of art, done in multiple colors on expensive stock, filled front and back with details about the individual and their station.

Most are 3.5 inches (high) x 5.5 inches (long) although the US post office does allow as small as 5" long x 3.5" high and as large as 6" long x 4 ¼" high.

While the odd (larger) sizes "stand out", they may not fit in the other ham's display or storage schemes. It's up to your own personal taste and ideas as to what size your card should be.

There are many places where you can get cards commercially printed (Google "QSL CARD" to find them on-line or check the adverts in QST or CQ Magazine). Perhaps there is a small job printer in your town who will run some off for you. Be prepared to provide your own artwork. Also be aware that a thousand cards will not cost much more than a run of five hundred. The cost is in the setup/preparation with the card stock a minor part. Typically, these local sources

will be more expensive than the ones who specialize in doing cards.

Single color (think black) will be the least expensive; multi color (think picture) the most costly. The latter is where the small job shops can't compete with the specialists.

With the speciality QSL card printers you also have the choice of a stock design (cheapest), modifying an existing one, or having them design a distinctive one just for you.

If you decide to do your own artwork for the printing company, check with them to see what form they prefer. Will they accept artwork on paper or do they want it in a digital format?

If you are going to design and print your own card "in-house" then you need software of some type and a printer (laser or inkjet) to produce your masterpiece.

Follow along and I'll show you how-to using Microsoft WORD (2003). If you have other similar software, adapt the following to your program.

Open WORD and click on
- TOOLS
- LETTERS AND MAILINGS
- ENVELOPES AND LABELS
- LABELS
- OPTIONS
- select the printer you will use
- select OTHER/CUSTOM
From the list that appears, choose one that is the size or close to the size you want for your card. I picked STALFORS 275553, and adjusted the width and height to 3.5 x 5.5 which gives me four cards per 8 ½ x 11 inch page. I then saved it as a custom label.

Pick a text font for your call sign, one that will stand out. For the other information on the card choose a simple, easy-to-read

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style. Don't have more than two different type faces or it will look cluttered and be harder to read.

Select text orientation to fit the card by going to FORMAT/TEXT DIRECTION. Use BOLD to emphasize your call sign and any other text you so choose, and the CENTER feature to align your text in the middle of the card.
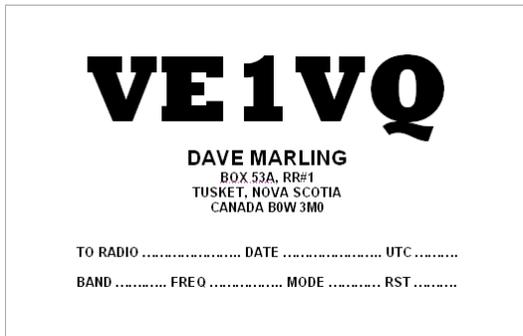

FIG. 1 – Simple card using Microsoft Word. Only two fonts are used.

Other than your call sign, name, and address what else should you have on your card? The obvious things are the other station's call sign, the date and time the contact was made, frequency, communications mode, and (for what it's worth) the signal report.

Use UTC (Coordingated Universal Time) rather than local time. That foreign station will not likely know about your local time zone. If you are sending a card as a result of a contact with a DXpedition then using local time will get your card tossed in the garbage can as they (usually) don't have the time to convert it to UTC.

If you are a member of a radio organization such as the ARRL you may want to add that information to the card. Don't have so many affiliations and awards displayed on your card that it makes it too cluttered.

There are arguments as to whether or not you should put your call sign and all of the contact information on a single side, or to keep the design uncluttered and simple, to put your name and call sign on one side and the info on the back. If you are having it done commercially then two sided is more expensive. Personally, I like everything on one side.

An inexpensive program that makes it easy to create your own design is PRINTSHOP, in its many and various incarnations, by Broderbund. This one has been around for quite a while (now in version #22). It is shown on their website for $39.99 for either CD or internet download but you may find it for less at your local software store. I've seen older versions with a discount coupon attached. EBay has earlier versions for $30 and less (some new in box).

FIG. 2 – Essentially the same card as Fig. 1 but done in PRINTSHOP with some drop shadow added to the call sign to give it a dimensional effect.

The advantage of PRINTSHOP over WORD is that you can move text and pictures around on the card anywhere you want them. You can even overlap things if you choose.

PRINTSHOP does not allow you to set the actual card size but does allow you to select from AVERY stock sizes. Pick the closest, print and trim to the standard QSL size if you want. Or, simply print to regular 8.5" x 11" card stock and cut to size.

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Moving up in the design world there are the more expensive commercial packages, but you are trying to keep costs down – remember that you are a ham and hams are chea…, err, thrifty!

Take a look at sites like http://www.download.com/, http://www.freewarefiles.com/ or http://www.tucows.com/ for freeware or trialware to design your own. Some of the software will be free (or asking for a small donation) while others may be commercially available but limited to a period of time before you are locked out.

Many programs will allow you to import a picture into your design. Keep it subtle so that your call sign is the most prominent thing that people see.

FIG. 3 – Using the same text from Fig. 2 but with a picture of the station added. The picture was "tinted" or reduced in color before being added as a background.

Subtlety is a good thought for anything on your card other than your call sign and the information to the other station. There are lots of designs out there that are so cluttered that the important information is not clearly visible at first glance.

If you already have some idea of what you want your card to look like, great! If not, then do some looking around on the internet for some ideas that you can use or modify.

Fonts! Fonts! And more Fonts! There are tons of sites on the net providing free fonts. Simply GOOGLE "free fonts" and browse until you find the perfect one for you. Save and install on your computer. Remember that saving every font you think you might someday use takes up memory once installed and slows down the initial computer start-up when turned on.

FIG. 4 – Same text again but with a map as the background.

You found just the right graphic or picture for your card on the internet. Can you use it? Not if it is copyrighted and not without permission of the copyright holder! Would you be taken to court if you used the graphic on your QSL card; probably not, but it then becomes a moral issue. What about the case where you download and modify it? From Wikipeida comes the following, "…copyright, in most cases, does not prohibit one from acts such as modifying, defacing, or destroying his or her own legitimately obtained copy of a copyrighted work, so long as duplication is not involved." That would seem to indicate that you would be safe with a modified download.

Be on the safe side and GOOGLE a search for "clipart" or "free clipart". Like fonts, there are a lot of sites with artwork for free.

Certain color combinations such as red/brown, red/green, or brown/green are not the best idea in town because they are hard to visually separate or distinguish one from the other. Look at cards you receive or

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designs on-line and see which ones "stand out" to you, and which ones resemble a "dog's breakfast".

Pay a visit to your local office supply store and wander down the paper isle. Look for the section containing "card stock". Pick the color and thickness you want. It can be a bit thinner if you plan on sending your cards out in envelopes or thicker if you send them on their own. I have some made by Georgia-Pacific listed as 110lb weight, just barely what I consider acceptable for mailing.

Another source for rolling your own is to upload your card as a picture in JPEG format to one of the developer places like WALMART or COSTCO. A 4" x 6" matte print, which you can trim to "standard size", currently goes for as low as $0.15 each in my area. Lower cost usually means less heavy paper so check before you have a gazillion printed.

How about seasonal card designs? You could have one for each season of the year. Make a standard text design and have a selection of background pictures you can vary with the time of the year.

You can have special ones if you operate during the holidays.

FIG. 5 – How about a QSL card for the Christmas season.

How about a special interest card? If you live near one of the temples or in a

significant historical area you can incorporate a picture of it (that you take) into your card. If you are into operating from lighthouses or islands or chapels, changes are easy to make.

These have been just a few ideas about making a QSL card on your own. I hope you find them useful.
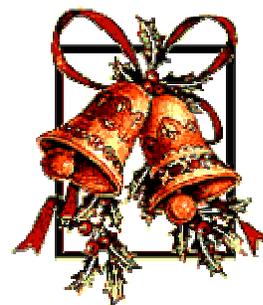
--- MARA NE ---

The following are a couple of web sites with more information on QSL cards:

Eham.net
http://www.eham.net/newham/qslcards?ehamsid=d88ff6905d0656bd05559dca64264f9d

ARRL
http://www.arrl.org/news/features/2002/06/14/1/?nc=1

IN THE JANUARY ISSUE…

N3HS's HF/VHF/UHF INSTALLATION IN HIS VAN.

DI-DAH-DI-DAH-DIT

How many times has Christmas come and gone without a single radio toy in your stocking or under the tree? And this despite your subtlety in leaving the ham catalogs around the house with pages open and items circled in highlighter!

Ever heard the phrase, "It is better to give than to receive"? Were you thinking it translated that it is better for someone to give something to you? Maybe you could rethink this! Look around your area and see if there is a ham that is just getting started and can't afford a two meter or an HF rig. Do you know interested in SWLing?

Dust off a spare radio that you're not using and make someone happy by giving it to them.

Be one of Santa's Helpers,
And have a Merry Christmas

Until next month,
VE1VQ

Who needs Santa when I have Grandma

E-mail your comments, ideas, or submissions to marane@mara.net

Join us on the Saturday morning SSB net at 0730 Eastern time on 3.8725 MHz