

THE NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2010 VOLUME 10, No. 8

Mercury Amateur Radio Association - MARA - North America - North East



Get the
essentials
ready -
it's time
to return!

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

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REPORT OF THE 2010 ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MARA - NORTHEAST

The Annual Meeting of the Mercury Amateur Radio Association was held on the 5th of June, 2010 at the Camp Hill Pennsylvania Ward Meeting House in Mechanicsburg, PA.

Those in attendance were:

Bruce Wortmann (N3IA), President
Steve Kelly (K2KEL), VP
Jeff Niceler (K3DEY)
Caryl Kelly (KC2QCL)
Mike Dirle (KN4EE)
Unknown visitor (volunteer note taker)

Welcome and Call to Order at 10:40 AM by Bruce Wortmann, President (N3IA)

Opening Prayer was offered by Jeff Niceler (K3DEY)

Minutes

Minutes of 2009 meeting were accepted by motion.

Treasurer's Report

Treasurer's report was accepted by motion.

Membership Report

Dues were accepted at the meeting from:

Caryl Kelly, KC2QCL (\$20 new member)
Jeff Niceler, K3DEY (\$10 renewal)

This, in addition to the information provided by Dave (VE1VQ) brings our current membership to nineteen (19).

Elections

None of the regular officer positions were up for election this year, however vacancies exist on the Board of Directors.

To fill the position left vacant by Shirrel Young (N3DIX/SK), expiring in 2013 – Mike Dirle was duly nominated, seconded and elected.

To fill the vacant position expiring in 2013 – Carly Kelly was duly nominated, seconded and elected.

The request from Stan Statten (N3HS) to be replaced

as Treasurer was presented. The responsibilities of the treasurer were discussed. There were no nominations for a replacement, and the matter was tabled.

General Discussions

The purpose of the organization was discussed. The development of a “Mission Statement” was considered, however the preamble to the organization’s constitution serves this purpose, though perhaps some minor updating is applicable.

It was suggested that our weekly HF nets could be supplemented with Echolink. While direct Echolink connection is not practical, a parallel or post net conference should be considered. Our primary method of organizational communication outside the net is the Yahoo group MARA_NE, the email reflector.

Several of the members are involved by calling with emergency communications in the church. Steve Kelly is the Regional Emergency Communications Specialist (ECS) for the area covering the Cherry Hill, Philadelphia, Valley Forge, Reading, and Wilmington Stakes. The region holds a weekly net on the UHF BEARS linked repeater system. Participation averages 25+ stations each week. Bruce is the ECS for Philadelphia.

A round of remembrances of Shirrel Young (N3DIX/SK) took place. He will be greatly missed by all who were privileged to know him. He was a great example to us all.

Jeff expressed our appreciation for the blackboard art and lunch arranged by Mike Dirle.

Proposed locations for our next annual meeting were discussed. It would be about time for a meeting in New England. Do we have membership in New England who could host the meeting? New York City was proposed. The stake center and Temple are there, though we would again be running afoul of the church web site’s information regarding use of church facilities. Holding the meeting in Dayton Ohio during the Hamvention was proposed. The Dayton proposal was accepted. Steve Kelly will follow up on how this could be accomplished. Further discussion among the entire membership can be held on the Yahoo group.

The meeting was adjourned by motion, and was closed with prayer by Bruce Wortmann at 12:20 PM.

Following the meeting and lunch the Kellys, Jeff, and Bruce travelled to Hershey PA and visited Chocolate World. What a treat!

MNE

MARA INTERNATIONAL

by Reg Hardman VK4XH

The following is a slightly edited version of an early July 2010 posting to the MARA-NE e-mail reflector.

From the material coming over the internet regarding MARA lately, one could get the impression that MARA is in the “also ran class” and has a lot to learn from others in the emergency business. Nothing could be further from the truth --- indeed some years ago MARA was at the cutting edge of getting things done in emergencies. At a time when MARA was fully embraced by the Church, this organization really performed in a number of emergencies. Let me relate a few cases.

Case 1 - South Pacific

In 1991, the Church was interested in setting up some form of communications during hurricane season in the South pacific, namely Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa (to Sydney Australia, Area headquarters) and approached MARA for help. Keep in mind these are the days before the internet. Upon accepting this assignment, MARA prepared an acceptable budget for equipment only, and ordered the following equipment after receiving faxes identifying potential tower sites.

One of everything for each of the three locations.

- Kenwood TS 50 transceivers + mics etc.
- Emtron tuners.
- Heavy duty rotors and controls.
- Nally self supporting towers pivoting on 8" diameter steel poles, base plate, and bolts.
- 3 element Yagi antennas.
- Sufficient Coax and 6 core rotor cable.
- Steel catenary wire.

The heavy duty stuff went by sea from Melbourne and the electronics by air.

The idea was that the locals would drill the large 20" X 20" X 7 foot hole for the tower pole, insert the appropriate steel form work ready for the concrete pour just before we arrived. Locals would also arrange the hiring of concrete trucks and a small crane to lift the heavy tower in position. The two MARA guys (myself VK4XH and Ian Hunt VK5QX) would then assemble the Yagi antennas while the concrete was curing, after which they would mount the antennas and rotors on the tower and test same. After procuring a licence from the local authority, contact would

be made with Sydney Australia. Keep in mind the two MARA guys only had one week to complete all installations and staff training for all 3 locations including travel time. A tall order.

Starting from Brisbane, the MARA guys took their personal tools and flew to Suva Fiji. Everything went well except it took 3 days (including several hours of training) instead of two. With the Fiji experience and time a problem, it was decided to split with one going to Tonga and the other to Samoa, thereby providing 4 days in each. Sufficient muscle power was available at each site. In Samoa it was discovered that no hole had been dug so the extra time proved useful, particularly so when the drill hit water at 3 feet. After displacing the water with concrete the tower was firmly positioned, antenna erected, equipment installed, tested and training given with 5 by 9 results to Sydney. The Tonga system went well also, and both MARA guys went home to Australia on Sunday exhausted but feeling good that they had accomplished a lot in such a short time. All work was voluntary with no remuneration.

We didn't have to wait long for disaster to hit. Approximately 6 months later Hurricane Val hit Samoa with winds of up to 150 MPH and sat on those Islands for five days causing death and destruction.

The destruction was so bad that Samoa lost all communications with the outside world except for the one lifeline of ham radio supplied by MARA who passed traffic for the Governments of Samoa, New Zealand, Australian, and numerous Foreign Consulates enquiring of the H & W (health and welfare) of their nationals. A great deal of other traffic was passed for churches and charity organizations, as well as many individuals. It became a full time job for MARA members covering mostly H & W traffic. To my knowledge, this is the only time that a country has relied exclusively on ham radio to communicate to the outside world.. If you would like more detail re this experience go to Pages 99 and

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100 of QST January 1993, or e-mail me for a copy. [See also the May, June, and July issues of the MARA-NE newsletter - Ed]

I was really surprised that the antenna did hold up quite well (its rating was only 85 MPH). In spite of building damage, MARA never missed a beat, having to contend with local personal type generators that malfunctioned, then having to revert to batteries because of storm and water damage. However, we never missed a word and we were able to communicate to the Sydney office a list of foodstuffs and materials required by the Samoan saints.

True to form the Church was responsible for the first plane to land at the local airport (after the hurricane had passed) with 30 tons of essentials as requested over the radio for hungry Samoan Saints, with a further 300 tons to arrive by ship a couple of weeks later. This was just before the big push with Public Affairs --- nevertheless, the Church received a great deal of kudos because of their involvement and speedy action made possible by MARA. Everything went like clockwork.

Final note

The Samoan Prime minister visited our radio room in Samoa --- he wanted to know what kind of great equipment was successfully used when far more sophisticated failed.

All he had to see was a very small 100 watt Kenwood transceiver sitting on the table.

Nothing much was said but there was a presence that said that there was something more than radio assisting us for that week.

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Case 2 San Francisco earthquake - late 1980s.

Sometimes there are conditions that require the ham radio operator to complete or support existing commercial operations in times of emergency. Such a case was the above San Francisco earthquake. As news of this disaster circulated around the world many thousands of people tried to call relatives and friends in SF to enquire of their welfare, thus creating a huge congestion for international calls, where very few got through. The local network in the Bay area was reasonably intact and of course set up to take many calls. With MARA contacting ham radio operators in the Bay area and having them call the requested party on the phone (or with phone patch) they are essen-

tially leapfrogging over the congestion to effect the same result, providing a great relief to the calling party.

Additional

Various single rescue operations from "complications in delivering a baby" in a remote part of Tonga to the rescue of yacht operators with boat problems in the South Pacific.

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED TO DATE

1.. In providing information to Church leaders we need to remember we are the eyes and ears of the Bishop, Stake President, Region or Area leadership as the case may be. We are the conduit by which these men gather the information to make the appropriate decisions. Therefore it is important that such leaders understand your capability and limitations as well as your expectations of such brethren.

2.. Knowing that the Bishops and Stake Presidents are "keepers of the flock" it is important for such leaders to have the potential to contact each member in times of emergency (even if the phones are out). Consequently, it may well be useful to conduct a VHF/UHF survey to ensure all member locations are covered. This became evident when there were some problems with this situation in Texas after Hurricane Ike went through the Houston area.

3.. Because of our flexibility, we are many times the first on the scene of a disaster, and the Church leadership require an accurate assessment of the situation. The first two weeks are the most critical, after which the commercial operators have generally established alternative forms of communication. You have up to two weeks to make an impression.,

4.. Of course, the technical aspects are most important in obtaining a clear signal, but sometimes the actual passage of audio needs to be interpreted by the operator for the leadership. Although Sydney had all the required gear to take the signals from Samoa during the crisis, because of accents and lack of "understanding" between the area leadership and the Sydney operator there was a decided preference to use a phone patch from Brisbane. If the presiding authority is using a telephone handset as with a phone patch be careful to monitor the conversation and cut the transmission when needed. Thinking that his speech is protected with the privacy of a phone call when he is really on the radio (with the whole world listening)

Because of our flexibility, we are many times the first on the scene of a disaster...

can sometimes cause embarrassment for the Church if the operator is not alert to what is being said. Such a circumstance occurred with the Sydney phone patch, and the embarrassment was avoided.

5.. Where possible, obey the FCC (or other country's) rules as set down. However, where life and limb are involved I have always felt such can be broken (third party traffic agreements and phone patching between countries) when the need does arise. Sound judgement needs to be exercised here as to the seriousness of the situation. Where there is doubt, I have found that seeking "forgiveness" rather than "permission" works well --- particularly when time is of the essence.

6.. When shipping in foodstuffs to an area, always try to get the same type of products that are usually consumed. In sending canned fish (usually mackerel in oil) to Samoa, some tuna in brine was inadvertently shipped and the comment came back "ship more mackerel in oil-- no more pet food". I believe there can be some exceptions in shipping product at a level reflecting a standard of living, etc. With their power disrupted, a number of kerosene and pressure lanterns were to be sent to Samoa with the pressure lanterns to go to American Samoa and the kerosene ones to Western Samoa. Saner minds came to the fore here, to avoid jealousy they were finally mixed up then shipped out thus avoiding the "poor cousin" syndrome.



VK4XH's present HF station from L to R - TL922 1200 watt Power amp, TS 50 Tcvr, switching power supply for TS 50, 200 watt and 3 KWatt tuners, and the rotor for the beam. Not in Pic but inside his car is an 857D Heathkit TCVR with an Atas 120 auto tune antenna. He also has IRLP capability on Node number 6139 with which he uses a VX5 Yaesu handheld.

7.. Where possible, have a back up system with a transceiver, a wire antenna that can be thrown over a tree and a small tuner. All of this can be packed in a Pelican waterproof carry case that can be carried out at a moment's notice ready to operate from a car battery if the regular antenna/ equipment is damaged. Such a system worked well when trialed in the Fiji bush and the outer Islands in Tonga back to Brisbane, Australia. (1995)

8.. With the emphasis on Public Affairs these days, contact your PA person in your unit and keep a written record of the activity at hand. My biggest regret is that there was not the PA emphasis at the time of Hurricane Val and a great opportunity was missed in telling the world that the Church had the presence of mind with preparation for the hurricane season and, that through MARA, were able to throw a lifeline to Samoa, and provide that country with communications to the outside world.

Drop me a line at rhardman@bigpond.net.au if you have questions.

Unfortunately, the Mara International net is no more; however it could be resurrected. I held out for quite a while but I finally gave it away when Bill Fahey (MARA Central) said, "If you don't, you won't have a pot to p... in"!

Reg Hardman VK4XH



VK4XH - Net control for nine years for the MARA International Net

[Is there any interest in starting up another International MARA Net? If there is, please contact Reg at the e-mail address shown above - Ed]

MNE

Grandma Mara's RAMBLINGS

After a two week hiatus, Wendy my 'student' knocked on my door at the usual Saturday morning appointed hour. We sat in the kitchen and talked for a bit about her interests, what she and her family had done on their vacation, and other important things that make up a young girl's life. Typically, they had gone to visit her grandparents; which she liked, because her grandma was teaching her to cook, and her grandpa told her stories about when he was a boy living on the farm.

Getting down to business, she brought the code practice oscillator (CPO) and hand key out of her backpack

and set them up on the kitchen table. She informed me that she had taken it with her on vacation and practiced code every day. She had memorized the entire alphabet and was working on the numbers. When I sent her some text at about five words per minute (wpm) from the Good Housekeeping magazine; darned if she didn't get most of them right!

She asked if she could listen to some code on my rig, so we tuned around 40 meters until we found some fairly slow stuff which she determinedly copied until the band changed and the signals disappeared. It was about ten wpm so she had gaps, but again, I was surprised at how much she did have down on paper. Encouraging her to write instead of printing, I let her tune around and listen some more.

When she had finished, and we were soaking our Oreo cookies in milk, I asked her how she had picked up her speed so quickly. She told me that she and her dad had found a web site where she could download free software to send text that you typed or pasted in, or random characters. Convincing him to take his laptop on vacation hadn't been hard. She said that she had to explain to her dad about speed and character spacing like I had for her, but that he caught on quickly!

MNE

CULTURED CORNER

by ANØNMS

RETURNS

*The month of September
is a month of returns
of one sort or another,
from which one can learn.*

*The first is the school house
For students big and small
Coming back from summer
Walking down those long halls*

*Then are the borrowed books
That are long overdue
And the cash penalties
That will often accrue*

*At the top of the list
That will be most returned
Are the things bought on sale
With the money you've earned.*

*Return for full refund
To have the pleasure thrice
Reverse it on your Visa
Buy something twice as nice.*

MNE

TECH STUFF

By VE1VQ

TOOLS REDUX

Back in the [November 2008 issue of the Newsletter](#), I wrote a TECH STUFF column about basic tools that I found most useful. I had asked, prior to that, in an e-mail on the reflector what others had for favorites. Looking through my saved messages the other day, I came across those forgotten responses, so here they are...

From Dan, AA3LS

Dave, would my tractor count? I replaced my 15 year old Kubota with a new one this week. Much more fun than the old one.

As to Craftsman tools... if they have moving parts, try another brand! Sears (Craftsman) seems to have a great warranty (I broke some 4-40 machine taps threading an aluminum block, and they happily replaced the taps. I had to replace the block! Hammers, wrenches, and such don't have moving parts (except for adjustable wrenches and pliers and so on). A much earlier tractor was a Craftsman. We had the repair folks out regularly, and eventually they didn't want my money for a renewed service contract!

From Stan, N3HS

How about the Sears breaker bar I have had for years. When I went to take the bolt off the front axle of a front wheel drive car, the Harbor Freight Tools ½ inch breaker bar simply twisted off. Went to Sears and got theirs. Used it with a couple of feet of pipe to get more leverage

and then stood on the end of the pipe and bounced on it til the bolt started to turn. One tough tool.

From Dan, AA3LS

But Stan, my breaker bars only have one moving part, at the swivel! The ratchet wrench I had from them must have had more moving parts, as it didn't last like the "NAPA" store brand version has.

From John, WA2EDB

Favorite Electronic Tool: The Model 2821 Tonghui portable LCR (inductance/ capacitance / resistance) meter.

Used to measure: L-Q, C-D, R-Q, Z-Q, with direct measurement values, or absolute deviation, or per cent deviation.

Basic accuracy: 0.3 %. Display: 5 digits. Ranges: 0.1 microHenry - 9999 Henry, 0.1 picoFarad - 9999 microFarad, 0.0001 Ohm - 999.9 MegOhms.

One has to realize that any measured negative capacitance value is actually an inductor; any measured negative inductance value is actually a capacitor. Three test frequencies are offered: 100 Hz, 120 Hz, and 1 kHz.

Handheld, portable, battery or DC adaptor operated. Test leads are substantial. Great tool for hobby or professional electronic measurements. Priced right, so I got two of them -- one for each hand!

From Chuck, WD4HXG

Another Craftsman caveat - The tools with digital displays or integral electronics have a warranty that is radically different than the other hand tools. Typically a year or less and then you are on your own.

Also I have had to go to the supervisor on a number of occasions when seeking replacements for hand tools as the sales associates often look at the tool and say "The warranty expired on this ages ago". Then when you explain they sell it with a lifetime warranty and get a look like you are from Mars.

Dad swears by Craftsman tools, I on the other hand swear at them.

Actually I gave up on buying first line tools when the kids came along. The wife thought it was cute they would try to fix everything in sight.

Along with the cute factor tools simply vanished. My son made two boxes jammed with chrome vanadium plated tools simply disappear. I searched the townhouse high and low. It drove me bonkers how a toddler could simply perform Houdini acts on that magnitude.

I gave up and simply started buying the cheap tools in the Trak Auto store (No longer in business).

When we moved out of the townhouse I recovered about 90% of the missing tools. Under the stairs in the basement I had packed boxes neatly. I left space between them so if needed they could be easily pulled without bringing down the entire stack. My son being the small tyke he was deftly maneuvered the spacing between the boxes were he deposited multiple wrenches, hammers, sockets, screwdrivers, you name it in neat little groupings out of sight.

Recovery was for naught. They quickly disappeared once again as by that point he had a little sister who was just as enthralled with shiny tools. It was simply amazing just how prissy she was running around with a 9/16' box end wrench in one hand and a hammer in the other, not to mention dangerous.

Just remember, a two year old girl with a hammer is a major hazard to the shins. (Ouch!)

VE1VQ

My son, who is a heavy duty truck mechanic in southern Alberta sometimes buys Snap-On level tools, and other times buys the Craftsman grade tools. He says for the non-demanding jobs the cheaper tools work fine, and if he breaks them, the lifetime warranty replaces them. For the more demanding tasks, the Snap-On ones are definitely better and last longer, and still have an unbeatable warranty.

I have a Craftsman electric sander that I bought nearly forty years ago in New Hampshire. It still works fine, but then I don't use it all that often. Maybe they made them better then.

Years back, I read that Black & Decker consumer grade 1/4-inch electric drills were only rated to last approximately fifteen hours. Mine lasted for years. When you think about it, you use the drill for a few minutes to drill a hole or two, and then put it back on the shelf for a couple of months (or years) before you use it again.

Whether it's tools or tractors, buy the best that you afford. Take care of them. Treat them with respect. More than likely, you will be able to pass them along to your grand children.

MNE

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"The trouble with so many of us is that we underestimate the power of simplicity. We have a tendency it seems to over complicate our lives and forget what's important and what's not. We tend to mistake movement for achievement. We tend to focus on activities instead of results. And as the pace of life continues to race along in the outside world, we forget that we have the power to control our lives regardless of what's going on outside."

Robert Stuberg

DI-DAH-DI-DAH^P

THE TIME HAD COME TO GO!

My office had reached the point a few months ago where only desperate measures would save it! While not quite ready for the TV program HOARDERS, it was nonetheless getting hard to work in there. In order to get from the door to the desks on the far side, it was necessary to step around or over equipment, or file boxes of old paperwork that the tax department requires us to keep or boxes of defective circuit boards that I was keeping for parts to build something someday. Somehow the building projects never kept up with the influx of circuit boards. The time had come to go!

I called my accountant who gave me the number of years worth of files I had to keep. The rest are gradually going into the shredder, as time and shredder overheating allows. The boxes of circuit boards have been trucked to the electronics recycling depot. And, although it broke my hoarder's heart, I even took a couple of old but working CRT computer monitors and an ancient but working laser printer in there as well.

I went through boxes of bits and pieces, new stuff that you buy three or seven in a plastic pack, but only use two or four - those kind of things. Stuff that I hadn't used in years and probably never would. Out it went to the curb (or what goes for a curb in my rural neighborhood).

Trash bags of shredded paper, trash bags of stuff. It all went. Either to the end of the driveway or to the recycling

depot. There's still more, but now at least, we can get around the office without risk of life and limb. And you know, once I got started it wasn't so bad. Kind of gives you a sense of satisfaction to see all of that bare floor.

But you just know what happened. A week after I did the major part of getting rid of the unused hardware, I needed a piece of that stuff, and darned if I didn't have to go out and buy it! Somewhere, there has to be some kind of happy medium. If we only could predict what we needed and what we could throw out. If only...

Until next month,
VE1VQ

WHAT RIG DO YOU USE FOR YOUR STATION?

Inquiring minds would like to know! Would you e-mail me with the model and manufacturer and what you like and/or dislike about it, for a future newsletter? Send your info to ve1vq@eastlink.ca