

The NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2012 VOLUME 12, No. 8

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

SEPTEMBER

is

NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS MONTH

How's your inner Boy Scout doing?

CONTENTS

- 2** GRANDMA MARA'S RAMBLINGS
RAMBLINGS OF AN OLDER PERSON - A FAMILY DECISION
- 2** TECH [and other] STUFF
VARIOUS AND SUNDRY STUFF
- 4** QUOTE OF THE MONTH
JOHN WAYNE
- 4** DI-DA-DI-DA-DIT
GET READY!

OTHER STUFF

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Links that will take you to web locations referenced in this newsletter are shown in [blue text](#).

E-mail your comments, ideas, or submissions to marane@mara.net or to ve1vq@eastlink.ca

Grandma Mara's RAMBLINGS

A couple of weeks after the big Field Day weekend in June, Wendy and her family, and Walter and I, got together for a combination de-briefing and social evening.

Once we were all assembled and comfortable, Wendy said that they had a family announcement to make. Her dad then spoke for the group to say that the Monday night after Field Day they had convened a family council, and because they had so much fun during Field Day weekend they decided they would all be going after their General Class tickets. Wendy said that she would be trying for her Extra at the same time. She felt she had enough on-air experience and was ready to "go for the gold" as she put it!

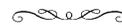
It was interesting to watch and listen to the discussion and interaction that ensued between Wendy and her family, and Walter. The conversation moved through study manuals, question pools, on-line practise tests, and first time VHF/UHF handheld radios. They talked about schedules and how much time they needed for study before the big day of the test. In the end, they set four months as a workable time period before they felt they would all be ready. Walter then worked out a schedule for study and practice tests between now and then.

He told them that he had several code practice oscillators they could borrow, if they wanted to study the code. Wendy's father replied that they had decided not to pursue that part of the hobby at this time, that studying the material alone would take all of their spare time and energy. He said they weren't sure if they wanted to learn CW or not. Walter took that comment in stride, even though he was basically a code man through and through. Still, he recognized that times were changing and the current new hams were not as interested in that part of amateur radio, as he was, largely because of having grown up with computers. He also knew now that hams didn't have to know the code in order to obtain a licence, a lot of them learned it for reasons of their own.

On that note, we adjourned to the kitchen for some refreshments. And no, we didn't have any dessert with

...because they had so much fun during Field Day weekend they decided they would all be going after their General Class tickets.

JELLO as an ingredient! Grandma's opinion is that any dessert without chocolate is a pure waste of time.



TECH AND OTHER STUFF

by VE1VQ

When the weather forecasters would say that there was a severe storm coming our way, my friend Tom and I used to kid each other that maybe this was the BIG ONE, and perhaps we would get to use our generators. Tom died a couple of years ago of a heart attack, after several years of being on kidney dialysis, and then having a successful kidney transplant. Every time I hear a storm warning, I think of him - and smile.

Since this is National Preparedness Month it might be a good time to remind everyone to check things out! And, since the weather is still nice enough to work outside, there's still time to get things ready for the winter season.

Being hams, this might be the time to check out our antennas and feed lines. Check out any tree limbs that might not look as healthy as they once did and remove them before they come down on something of value (like your house or vehicle, or a family member!).

If you have a generator, get some fresh fuel and run it for a few minutes. When your entire neighborhood is in the dark, may not be a good time to think about what you should have done. It might not be a bad idea to run whatever you expect to power during an electrical failure every few months just to be sure.

For those of us on the east coast of North America, hurricane season is here. [WX4NHC](#) is the hurricane center's call sign. Check out their web site for further information.

Net frequencies for such events are:

20 meters : 14.325 MHz Hurricane Watch Net
(Main frequency during Hurricanes)
40 meters : 7.268 MHz Water Way Net
(secondary frequency) Maritime Mobiles Net
80 meters : 3.815 MHz Caribbean Net,
(Alternates: 3.950 MHz North Florida / 3.940 MHz South Florida)

Don't forget the Washington DC ERC nets on 80 and 40 meters every Saturday morning. Contact Dan, NE3Z at dangoodson@mac.com for frequencies and times. Print

them off and stick them by your radio (just in case). You may never need them for your area but you might be able to help someone else, by acting as a relay station.



Last month, I wrote a bit about my adventures with some of the digital modes using a TigerTronics Signalink interface and FLdigi (Windows) software. There are two e-mail reflectors each dealing with problems related to the hardware and the software. If you are using either of these products, you really need to join these reflectors.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TigertronicsSignalink/>
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/win-fldigi/>

The *win-fldigi* reflector is quite busy with a lot of users and many kinds of rigs. The Signalink reflector activity is sporadic - some weeks are busy, while others have no traffic at all. On both of these, even the answers to questions concerning rigs other than mine are both interesting and informative.

I was fortunate (more so than some *win-fldigi* users) in that the software worked on receive and transmit right from the initial installation. A few others, from comments I see on-line, have spent hours and hours trying to get the software/hardware to work, and are giving up. Most, I suspect, are like me and get results in a short time without a lot of problems.

In my case, the hardware was a bit of a problem. I covered that in last month's column. To be fair, it did work out of the box, just that the TX control's spread was much

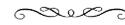
too narrow for my liking. The Signalink support guy was helpful and came up with the eventual fix.

Just about any piece of amateur radio equipment has its own support reflector, and these are usually monitored by the manufacturer or, in the case of software, the author. From what I see, a lot of them lurk in the background and come out with information if no one else on the reflector does. In the case of *fldigi*, W1HKJ is always prompt with an answer, and responsive to suggestions for changes.

If you have a new piece of equipment, or a new store bought or even a home brew antenna, and you want to get the most out of it, my suggestion is to find and join the reflector (or reflectors). Unless you've just purchased serial number 0001, then it's likely someone else has already

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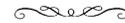
had the problem, and you can benefit from their misfortune and experience.



Did anyone work any LDS Field Day stations on the 20th and 21st of July? I listened around the 20 meter PSK frequencies (a lot!) and didn't see anybody calling. I put out a few CQ's and had a single station (AI4LT) come back to me. I hope we weren't the only two stations who participated!

Doing a GOOGLE search (in August) on "lds field day" found me another one on the 24th (of July). Check out <https://tech.lds.org/forum/showthread.php?5273-LDS-Amateur-Radio-Field-Day-July-24th-2010>. You will need an LDS user name and password to access it. I definitely somehow missed this one!

Seems like a bunch of people (including me, for a while earlier this year) were trying to invent the same wheel by each having an LDS Field Day, and probably thinking we were the only ones doing it. I guess if we can't get together, we need a bit more publicity so we all know about each other and can at least attempt to call each other on our various FD's.



One Saturday morning in early August, when I turned on my TenTec for the early sideband MARA and ERC nets, it began cycling between receive and transmit about every half second. No power was showing on the watt meter when it went into transmit, however.

I pulled the hand key plug out of its socket on the front of the rig and the cycling stopped. Plugged it back in and it started up again. I found the key under a bunch of papers and checked but it wasn't physically closed. Even measured it for a short circuit with a test meter. Now what? Is this going to involve a trip back to the manufacturer?

With the key disconnected, I could place the rig in TUNE and have the usual low power output on the wattmeter. I

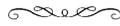
could hear the usual received noise on 75 meters but no stations on the MARA NE net frequency. The latter's been the norm for a few months now so that really wasn't a concern (as far as the operation of the rig went!).

In the end, the problem turned out to be in the menu settings. Switching between microphone and digital interface involves changing some of the menu choices, like the audio input, and voice processing. When I checked those that I frequently change, I found them all to be correct. I did find, however, that the CW keyer setting had changed

...most station troubles are not all that difficult to find and fix - once the initial panic subsides!

to MODE B. Resetting that to OFF fixed my trouble.

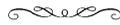
This just goes to show that *most* station troubles are not all that difficult to find and fix - once the initial panic subsides! I won't say it too loud however, in case the rig "hears" me, and does something really complicated (and expensive)!



I happened upon STATSCROP.com, a website ranking group, the other day.

"Mara.net has 17 years old (grammar is correct!), it is ranked #9,447,268 in the world, a low rank means that this website gets lots of visitors. This site is worth \$784 USD and advertising revenue is \$0 USD per day. it has 17 visitors and 17 pageviews per day."

Wow, seventeen visits per day - We're almost ready for the big time! Watch out world!!



Pictures and Words

How about sending a picture of you and your station? If so inclined, send me a bit of a write-up about your ham radio career. And if you have one, send me a copy of your QSL card.

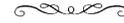
You're thinking, "no one wants to hear about me!" That's not true because *everyone* has an interesting story to tell.

Send it to VE1VQ@eastlink.ca in whatever format you want - even scribbled in pencil on a piece of paper.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Life is tough, but it's tougher when you're stupid!"

~ John Wayne



More Pictures and Words

Did you or your group participate in this year's Field Day or LDS Field Day or provide communications support for a group? If you did, how about sending us a picture and/or a write-up?

Send it to VE1VQ@eastlink.ca

DI-DAH-DI-DAH ^P_T

September is National Preparedness Month. According to the Center for Disease Control's web site, "Would you be ready if there were an emergency?"

Be prepared: assemble an emergency supply kit, make your emergency plans, stay informed, and get involved in helping your family, your business, and your community be ready for emergencies."

First, take care of yourself - make an emergency supply kit. Make one for your vehicle as well, as the chances are good that you will be away from your home when an emergency happens. Next, make an emergency plan for yourself and your family. Know where to meet if you have to leave your home. Third, stay informed by using the local media, the internet and other reliable sources of information. And lastly, get involved in emergency planning in your community.

Check out the site. It fits in well with the Church's "thoughts" about emergency preparation.

Then there is the Church's own site at <http://www.lds.org/family/family-well-being/emergency-preparedness>. It looks at a longer

time, not just the short time period immediately following the crisis. It's interesting to note that the food storage is now being looked at for three months

rather than the one year stressed for so long. For a lot of members, I suspect that twelve months worth of food was a daunting task to consider, let alone to achieve. Three months is an easier target to hit, and a confidence builder toward achieving the larger goal.

The same site also has a link to emergency communications, with the same old warning about MARA using church owned buildings for meetings. Nothing new there!

Anyway, being hams, we should already know about this [emergency stuff](#), shouldn't we? If we don't, we can't say we haven't been told.

...being hams, we should already know about this emergency stuff, shouldn't we?

Until next month,
VE1VQ