

Atlantic Division 2010 Board Report

During 2009, the Atlantic Division was on the move. Both Vice Director Abernethy and I attended a number of amateur radio conventions and hamfests held within the division.

For 2009's Field Day, Tom and I planned to participate in our own local Field Day events rather than traveling around the division visiting Field Day sites.

Our cabinet meeting this year was held in Gettysburg, PA. Laura Smith was our keynote speaker and we found that the amateur radio enforcement remained in good hands. ARRL General Counsel, Chris Imlay W3KD gave an excellent presentation on club legal issues and we did a live webinar from the hotel meeting room of Chris's presentation.

In October, we had two conventions in Western New York. EmComm East was held in Rochester and the Western New York Section Convention was held in Buffalo. ARRL COO Harold Kramer was the keynote speaker for EmComm East. Harold put in some heavy road miles that weekend by joining Vice Director Abernethy and me in presentations at EmComm East, then a 5 hour round trip to Warren, PA and back for an amateur radio club dinner presentation. Then the following day to Buffalo for the Western New York Section Convention.

Our division held a number of webinars with educational topics for our members. On a number of these webinars, we partnered with several other Division Directors to offer these webinars to members in multiple divisions.

Topics included:

- Issues for Club Officers
- Digital Modes
- HR-2160 with Dave Sumner K1ZZ
- Pennsylvania Act 88 update (Pennsylvania PRB-1 type legislation)
- A Visit with Laura Smith
- MIMS Compliant Exercise
- Emotional Grab and Go Kit

A number of online meetings were held with division Section Managers and Assistant Directors.

As a result of a request from MDC Section Manager Jim Cross, we held a meeting with division Section Managers to see if there was interest in a division-wide SET in 2009. Several of our sections did participate together in the SET.

Recognizing a need to look at different demographics for recruiting amateur radio operators, our division formed a committee chaired by Atlantic Division Assistant Director Riley Hollingsworth K4ZDH with other movers and shakers in the amateur community to explore options. The committee presented their report which is attached at the end of this report.

Bill Edgar N3LLR
Atlantic Division Director

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FROM: Atlantic Division Committee for Amateur Recruitment

TO: Bill Edgar, N3LLR, Atlantic Division Director
Tom Abernethy, W3TOM, Atlantic Division Vice Director

DATE: November 30, 2009

SUBJECT: Joint Report on Options for Recruitment in the Amateur Radio Service

It is not necessary to restate the issue we are dealing with except to say that we are in worrisome territory regarding our demographics. The general populations of all western countries are aging; and the Western demographic pyramid, with the percentage of youngest people at the bottom and oldest at the top, has become an upside down pyramid. That trend has become obvious in day to day observations in all areas of life, whether in large cities or small, and of course it is reflected in the Amateur Radio population. Amateur Radio is both a hobby and a service. To the extent it is a hobby, it is a rather technical one with testing required. Perhaps we cannot expect recruitment to be as easy as in other hobbies. We all agree, however, that the demographic warning signs appear more pronounced in the Amateur radio service raise alarms for the future.

In spite of having observed this problem for years, we do not find it an easy problem to solve. Perhaps that is because we hope for a meteoric one-stroke solution to the problem, when in fact incremental efforts across the entire Amateur population on a day to day basis may hold the answer.

This memorandum encompasses all the suggestions and ideas circulated among Committee members and for that reason the ideas are not (with a few exceptions) specifically attributed. Based upon all the Committee input it seems we need to focus on the areas set out below. These are not colossal "massive effort" recommendations, but on the other hand each appears manageable and could be overseen by a few people in a given area

A. Revitalize the resources we are already using to recruit new licensees:

First we should reassess, preserve and make certain we are taking advantage of a resource started years ago with very good success: the Big Project. This project was started by ARRL President Jim Haynie. Where are the stations, how many are active, what do they need, what happens to the equipment when they are dormant, awaiting another teacher to take over the effort?

Can we rejuvenate them? Are teachers available to run the station? To what extent do we have licensees like Sean Barnes and Ron Small, both of whom have been one man recruiting armies? It is even more important to know what resources we have and what they are doing now that state budgets require cutbacks in school programs.

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The Big Project stations that are in college towns---can we get them affiliated with the college Amateur clubs? Could there be contests between the college clubs to see how many recruits they can get? Could there be contests within school Big Project stations to see who could get 25 DX contacts, e.g.?

While it may or may not be practical to start more Big Project stations, we should take full advantage of the ones we have. We **MUST** have an ongoing relationship with them, and make certain that this program and its high level of contributions from industry do not go dormant.

Linked with the above are college stations. Do we have a composite list of all college stations and do we work with them on an ongoing basis? They could be a good source of recruiting in high schools and colleges. While it is true that membership continuity is a problem and it would take a lot of interaction, what can we do to encourage them and offer resources? What if we initiated a competition between college stations to see who could get the most new licensees, and offered a big box transceiver as a prize, or an antenna system?

Could we be a resource to help college stations interface with their campus administrations and maintain high quality stations?

Newsline recently carried a story on a new web site, **www.CollegeARC.com**, established “to provide a way for college, university, and all other higher education schools with a student club interested in ham radio to interact with one another online”. This site is off to an impressive start, carrying articles on club stations as well as technical ones on subjects such as soldering. With all clubs encouraged to become members of this, we have a tremendous potential of reaching every one of them and of measuring activity.

Corporate and military club stations. Yaesu and Motorola, just to mention a few, have a large network of club stations. To what extent are they recruiting from their companies? There could be recruiting competition there too. The same applies to Coast Guard, Coast Guard Auxiliary and Civil Air Patrol (CAP). To what extent can we take advantage of the new military Amateur station at the Pentagon? We should know this and we should have an ongoing coordination with the Pentagon station and with each of the entities listed.

Local Amateur Radio Clubs and Field Day. To what extent are they involved in recruiting and publicizing Amateur radio rather than just having periodic meetings at a buffet restaurant and possibly a Field Day station?

Far too many Field Day weekends are something the local Amateurs know about, but they are held in rather isolated areas and are not used as a public relations tool. There are numerous Field Day events that appear to be set up just for the local Amateur Club, held at locations not even accessible to the general public. This is another resource that we can invigorate and emphasize as a recruiting tool.

At Field Day there should be many more spectators than operators---it is not just a competition but a major recruiting and public relations tool. Do most Field Day clubs invite the Girl or Boy

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Scouts, CAP or mentors in local or county mentoring programs? Do they have quality prepackaged materials to hand out to the public, materials they could take home with them to read? Merely being able to verbally explain Amateur Radio to a spectator is not enough in this age of short attention spans and extreme information overload. Field Day should be a publicity tool for Amateur Radio.

How about Fox Hunting in conjunction with the Boy Scouts or Cub Scouts? What relation would Field Day activities have with Fox Hunting or activities for BSA merit badges? We know from experience that Fox Hunting fascinates many young people.

Geo Caching is a popular activity these days and Amateur radio could be woven in to that, at least in demonstrations at Field Day sites.

Regarding all clubs and groups that teach classes, to what extent do they follow up with successful test candidates to make sure they stay involved? Do we help them with antennas and equipment, and RFI issues? We should know what each and every teaching club does in that regard.

We absolutely must know to what extent our present resources are engaged, or are dormant, and do everything we can to enhance their potential, as a force multiplier, before we attempt to initiate new ideas for recruiting.

Finally, one resource we hear about is the Radio Club of America and its program to reach inner city youth with funding and other support. This program is run by Carole Perry, WN2MGP. To what extent are we assisting this resource and it is making measurable gains in recruitment? To what extent could it assist our efforts?

B. New Areas to explore regarding recruiting

Truckers and CB operators generally. We all agree that the stigma regarding truckers and CB has for the most part become obsolete. There are many good Amateur operators in the trucking and CB ranks. Regarding those of us who get nightmares over the idea of recruiting from these groups, it just means one thing: we are OLD. Everything has changed but our thinking, and here we have a resource of people who are already interested in communications and could contribute to the public safety aspect of Amateur Radio.

Many truckers do not even use CB anymore. That could mean they are adept at other forms of communications—in fact many have cellular and Blackberry units, etc., or are interested in more sophisticated forms of communications, having become bored or appalled at whatever exposure they have had to CB in the past.

We need to rethink this area as a source of radio operators, particularly since the industry has grown since the 60's and 70's and the interstate highway system is vast compared to what it was in the 60's and 70's. Many more of us now live close to trucking areas and a convergence of interstate highways, even in the rare areas that can be considered "Main Street" America. We can no longer afford to write off this resource.

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Our Committee member R. J. Harris of WHP radio correctly cites the increasing interest in 2 Meter activity on the interstates and the fact that more and more we hear activity on simplex calling frequencies, even “CQ’s”. He has offered to make some public service announcements for use on A.M. radio. He mentions the possibility of getting spots on a show such as Coast to Coast AM. He said in his October 2, 2009 e mail, which we circulated, that C Crane Company is one of the top advertisers on that show and is marketing a receive only 2 meter radio that anyone can use to listen to Amateur radio during emergencies.

Some say that FM radio has become totally canned in that you hear the same formats and people (such as Delilah) everywhere, and that it’s AM that is more interesting now. I do not know that for a fact, but we should not overlook the AM potential and we may be surprised at the result.

There are trucking conventions around the country that would rival Dayton. Kentucky, for example, has had a trucking show on a large scale for 36 years. There are trucking channels on Sirius and XM. There are several very good trucking magazines and web sites, and of course thousands of truck stops. We need to consider booths at the major trucking shows and conventions. Booths are expensive but if we can have them at Dayton and other places we can have them at trucking conventions. People generally have an inherent fascination for communications in many forms. These booths would draw big crowds if done properly and if they had an enhancement such as operating station including Two Meters, most likely easily done in a convention arena setting in cooperation with local repeaters.

Alan Frame suggests a trial “Truck Stop Information Site”. This idea should be explored because we could set up a booth with information about Amateur radio and promote the advantages of the Amateur Radio Service. A good starting point might be Carlisle, PA, which is in the WHP radio range area. If we kept up with those who appeared interested, perhaps if they became licensees we could arrange for some token award to be given to them by ARRL or equipment manufacturers. Manufacturers are, of course, stakeholders in this effort too. Booths that are done correctly are expensive, but ARRL people have long experience in this area. With the cooperation of the trucking facility, we would want to put up an antenna---at least for two meters.

This category of possibilities includes RV’rs as well. There are countless RV clubs and conventions around the country and with the recession/depression so far keeping gas prices marginally in check, RV activity—at least with the core of enthusiasts—seem to be doing reasonably well. In addition to conventions and clubs, we could take it upon ourselves to “adopt” a local RV park or campground and make sure all participants on a given weekend were given brochures on ham radio along with contact info.

C. Things for all Amateurs to consider

We need to reduce complacency and raise awareness among our everyday ranks by challenging each licensee to recruit one new licensee. This is much easier said than done. Tom Coates points out that Amateurs may be too oriented towards collecting QSLs, grid zones, countries, islands, states, counties and lighthouses and various types of endorsements, and not

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sufficiently oriented towards gaining new licensees in our ranks and teaching them about radio. We hear on the air bragging (justifiable for sure) of countries or zones worked, but not about numbers of new licensees achieved or renewals on the part of inactive licensees encouraged. This competitiveness in our ranks is an excellent asset and perhaps a part of that could be directed towards boosting our ranks of good operators for the future.

Instead of “When All Else Fails” stickers, or in addition to, how about “Ask me About Ham Radio” stickers, suggested by one of our Committee members. Could our radio clubs in cooperation with the ARRL buy these and make sure every Amateur in the clubs’ area gets one?

How about starting a HAMBassador concept, similar to what the Good Sam Club does with SAMbassadors?

D. Conclusion

In focusing our efforts in these specific areas---existing resources that we may be underutilizing, recruiting among new groups, re-creating Field Day and local clubs where necessary, we may discover other ways to accomplish our goal of drawing more young people into our ranks. If we divided these areas there is no reason we could not make substantial progress in 2010, with the goal of meeting every three months to review our progress. Then perhaps this time next year we could “stand down”, rethink the efforts and determine if we are on the right track. Finally, if we undertake this, we must have a way of measuring our gains.

With the upcoming sun spot activity and the resulting improvement in Amateur radio communications, this is an opportune time to undertake a major effort at boosting our ranks, with the hope that Amateur radio will last a thousand years.

Finally, we must remember that exposing a person to Amateur Radio is almost as important as gaining new licensees. The more the general public understands about Amateur radio, the more people may be drawn to it at a later time as they have the opportunity, and the more they may become sympathetic to the service. As an insurance policy for the future, it is crucial to have such a general public understanding among neighborhoods, city councils, local emergency leadership, planning and zoning commissions and other local leaders.

Committee members: Tom Coates, N3IJ; Alan Frame, WB3FTD; Richard Harris, W3HP; Dan Henderson, N1ND; Riley Hollingsworth, K4ZDH; Kurt Keilhofer, KC8RWD; Ron Nelson, W3RN; Vinnie Sallusito, N4NYY; Chuck Skolaut, K0BOG; George Strayline, W2GSS.