

Newly Minted Ham Radio Operators Getting on the Air:

So, after hours and hours of work and lots of sweat equity involved, some new hams have become lifelong members of the amateur radio community here in Southern Alberta. I have been involved in some of the successes and for that I am like a proud father. But the real congratulations go to the ones that have accomplished the feat by working hard on their own. Here is the list:

Mike Charters - VA6PLC
Peter Pankonin - VA6ARI
Paul Hunt - VA6ADJ
Doug Balla - VE6FDE
Terry Hansen - VE6IOO

I want to let everyone know that each of the new hams have achieved over 90% with one achieving a 100% mark. These individuals will receive a full year of membership to the Southern Alberta Amateur Radio Club (SAARC).

Now the real fun begins. It's time to get on the air and use those amazing new licenses for communicating with others around the globe. Oh, and while I'm on that subject; have you ever wondered why the bands seem dead? They actually aren't you know? In fact, all you have to do is wait till there is a good sized contest on any of the modes you want to work and with the help of a bandscope have a look at the signals. Here's a couple of examples:





The first one was on November the 3rd, 2019 in the bottom of the sunspot cycle 24. Those are CW stations. Obviously not a dead band by any means. The second one is from November 15, 2020, which was still in the low part of the cycle a year later. Look at the stations both on CW and in the SSB section of 20M.

So how come there appear to be a huge number of stations on the air and that conditions appear to be fairly good. Your guess is as good as mine, but here is my theory. It's because people want something out of it and they don't just sit there and endlessly listen. In this case they are looking for points toward a contest total. So the whole point of that is to put something on the air, like a signal, so that someone can copy it and respond in kind. Hmmm?

I'm always reminded of an old friend of mine out on the coast, who everybody who checks into the BC Net knows, Bob Earl - VE7SQ. Bobby and I were licensed in the same year, and he became a heavy duty CW operator with his Galaxy V on 20M. He had a 20M vertical in the backyard that he kept nearly submerged at the base by watering it in order to give him a better ground. I came over one day and noticed that the band was pretty dead. He told me that he doubted that. He fired up the rig and on low power put out a call. Immediately he received a reply, and the band came alive. There is more to this story that I'm not going to relate but suffice to say there were lots of people out there listening. But that's the point, isn't it? Lots of people listening, you say. Yes, but very few were actually transmitting. If you want to talk to someone and you can't hear anyone, then get on the air and call CQ. You might be surprised by the results. Whether it is on CW or on SSB, the results are the

same. You will be heard by someone, and they will respond because they have been listening just like you, waiting for someone to begin the process. Begin the process by taking the initiative yourself. Call CQ.

The sun and subsequently the bands have been going through some variation lately, to say the least. Don't let that dissuade you from doing what hams do, communicate. Many DX contacts are out there, and you can work them with some pretty simple antennas and low power. You don't need a kilowatt to work most anyone in the world. Very few hams can afford to put up huge towers and big beams at first. The simplest vertical on 20M made out of some aluminum tubing from the hardware store, a Coke bottle and a bunch of 1/4 wave radials will get you on the most exciting band, 20M with a minimum of dollars being spent. A 20M vertical is one of the best DX antennas ever devised and it is simple and cheap to make. By the way, Princess Auto in Lethbridge and elsewhere sells some great aluminum tubing for reasonable prices.

Remember that the California Kilowatts out there put out signals with their 1,500-watt stations connected to stacked 10 element wide spaced beams at 5,000 ft pointed towards the same stations you are trying to work. Just be patient and keep calling knowing that your signal will get through eventually if you persevere. QRP stations work the world all the time. It just takes patience and tenacity to get those rare ones.

But most importantly, we all began with something small in the beginning and over time as you gather more "stuff" and become more proficient at your hobby, things will get better, and you will start working the world and then the fun begins. In the meantime, welcome to ham radio. The most exclusive club in the world when it comes to numbers of people licensed. Neat, eh?

73

Tom VE6ARG