

The content which follows is a transcript of the Practical Amateur Radio Podcast hosted by Jerry Taylor, KD0BIK. This monthly version of PARP is typically released the last week of each month.

The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast – Episode number 39.

From the ham shack of KD0BIK, located in Colorful Colorado, this is the Practical Amateur Radio Podcast.

This is show number 39, volume number 3 with a release date of May 2, 2010.

Hello everyone. My name is Jerry Taylor; my amateur radio call sign is KD0BIK and welcome to the Practical Amateur Radio Podcast...Creating Elmers One Podcast at a time. Amateur radio or ham radio is what this podcast is all about. If you are currently studying for your exam or have been in ham radio for years....I'm hopeful this podcast will help you. If it has helped you, I hope you will continue to listen and I also hope you'll tell others. Also, in keeping with our Creating Elmers one podcast at a time philosophy, if you learn something from our podcasts....please share that knowledge with others.

Welcome back to another episode of The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast, I'm so glad you've returned. The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast, a proud member of the Tech Podcast Network. If it's tech, it's here.

For those who were paying attention during episode 38, Towards the end of the show I stated the following: May is a big month for the Practical Amateur Radio Podcast. This May we will celebrate our 2nd anniversary of podcasting. May is also an important month for another reason which I'll share with you next time.

Well in just a few days, both here in the US and in some 50+ Countries around the world many will celebrate Mother's Day on Sunday, May 9th. Please remember your Mom and your wife on this very special day and treat them well. Our Mom's and our wives put up with a lot with in relation to our involvement with this hobby and we need to make sure we thank them. Take them out for the day, buy them flowers and just treat them as they should be treated.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother's_Day

Yes, The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast turns 2 years old this month. At the present time, I've produced some 55 episodes. This includes some of the special episodes I created when I attended HamCon Colorado, all the regular episodes (this one being #39) and the new QRP version. I honestly love podcasting about amateur radio and I hope it shows with each and every episode.

For those who are just finding the podcast and have not listened to some of the early episodes. The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast debuted on May 7, 2008. Prior to May 7th I had produced about a half-dozen Youtube videos. By the way, you can view these Youtube videos either through Youtube. Just search for my call sign, KD0BIK. Or you can also view them via MyAmateurRadio.com. Look on the left-hand side for the blue menu titled Videos.

I had fun making those early videos but I personally enjoy audio only podcasts as I can listen while driving, working, walking, biking etc. and not have to focus on watching something. Not a good idea when driving. I had subscribed to all the amateur radio podcasts I could find at the time and couldn't wait for new episodes to hit my iTunes account.

Two of these podcasts which I listened to before any others were Resonant Frequency and Soldersmoke. I really owe a lot of perhaps what I might call success to Richard, KB5JBV. Richard is the host of Resonant Frequency and co-host of Linux in the ham shack. As I started my show, I bounced ideas off of Richard and he has always been provided encouragement with his advice.

Like I said, I listened to Resonant Frequency and Soldersmoke first and then would listen as I had time to the others. I knew what I wanted for the Practical Amateur Radio Podcast was something similar, but not a duplication of either of these two fine shows and so the podcast was born.

I'm so appreciative to each and every listener who stuck it out through the first 10 or so episodes. Those episodes were certainly rough around the edges as I was getting the hang of this thing called podcasting. The funny thing is.....you might not think it is nervous to sit down and record a podcast. After all, no one is listening...no one is watching...no one hears your screw-ups which you can easily edit out and no one hears your screams of frustration when you keep making the same mistakes over and over. But I will admit I was nervous on many of those very early episodes and I know it showed in the finished product.

I started the podcast on a budget of zero dollars. I already had a computer, I found free Windows audio editing software called Audacity and I used a Plantronics USB headset which I have through work for mobile VoIP access through my company laptop. I also already had web hosting for my personal websites and blogs. Again...zero budget.

As those first half-dozen or so episodes began flying out of the make shift podcast studio, I realized great things were happening. First, each month the stats indicated more episodes were being downloaded and hits to the website was also growing at a healthy pace. Also, feedback was rolling in from all of you wonderful listeners and I knew the show was successful. It was time to take things to the next level.

I believe what happened next was done through Twitter. I had tweeted one day in late 2008 about wanting to look at upgrading my setup and that was when I first really got to know Jim Shrine, N6DHz owner of The DXStore. Jim introduced me to the power of the Heil PR40 microphone. And let me tell you...this microphone is awesome. However, with bringing in the PR40 I also needed an audio mixer. Very soon after getting that setup I realized I had a noisy PC. Meaning when my main PC was connected through my mixer I had this audio hum I couldn't get rid of.

Instead of buying a new PC or a new sound card I decided I wanted to record into a digital recorder versus directly into a PC and there went a few more hundred dollars. But outside of the Heil PR40, the digital recorder has been the best investment. Not only was the PC soundcard noisy, my desktop computer fan is a little louder than most and since the digital recorder, mixer etc. have no moving parts...there is nothing else in the room that makes noise. Well almost....

Just about 2 months ago, I added one more component to my studio setup and that was a noise gate, compressor, limiter. This helps to eliminate room noise such as air coming out of the vents when the furnace is running. I think my wife got tired of me shutting off the heat when I recorded episodes during the coldest winter days. In addition, the noise gate will also help clean up some of the noise from my telephone bridge and on skype calls when I get back into doing telephone interviews.

So essentially when I record a podcast episode, the audio from my microphone and all other mixed in audio such as the opening jingle and transition music etc. are all mixed in at time of recording and all get recorded into the digital recorder. The digital recorder saves the file as an mp3 and I copy that file over to my PC and upload it to the web.

As I look to the future and the future of this podcast, I'm extremely excited. I have a whiteboard in my studio/shack/office and the whiteboard is full of ideas for future topics and ideas for the show. I don't see a lot of changes in the format and the type of content I'll produce in the next year or two. I truly love bringing information to you in a practical fashion.

I've also been pleased with the response I've received from listeners about the QRP version of the podcast. While I'm not sure what I was thinking when I thought I could keep it to around 5 minutes.....there just is no way of doing that....I find it is quick and easy for me to get these episodes out to you.

I want to read you a posting from our MyAmateurradio.com Forum from my very good friend Jim, AF6PU. He writes (and I quote), "I really like the new QRP format, It is a lot like taking a baby aspirin - it does a lot, but is easy to swallow." (end quote) I'm so proud of this feedback...Thank you, Jim.

The QRP version of the podcast is just one of several projects I want to do in 2010 and 2011. Some of these projects are audio based content, but some are not. I'll share more with you later in the year. It's all very good and all very exciting.

One sort of present that I'm giving to the podcast for its second birthday is some new artwork. I'm working with a local Denver guy to create some new artwork which will be used to represent the podcast going forward. The images I'm using now were made by yours truly and I'm just no web designer. Look for this new artwork to be available sometime in early summer.

Yes we do have a topic for this episode and I'm about to kick that off. But while I transition to it, I just want to thank each and every one of you for listening, for sending me feedback both email and audio format through the Google voicemail (I'll share some of this audio feedback at the end of this episode) and Thank you....THANK YOU for really making the tagline mean something when I say "Creating Elmers one Podcast at a time". It really is this action which has helped to make the show successful.

In recent months the main focus of this podcast has been to teach you something or to share something with you or to get you to try something new. Just in 2010, I've talked about ways of turning New Years Resolutions into ways of thinking about what you can do to get more out of the hobby. I've also introduced you to APRS and WSPR. I certainly hope this information has helped to answer questions about these modes and helped you decide if they are right for you.

Our episode today is taking a slightly different approach to things and no I'm not going to introduce you to anything new or explain something cool and exciting. What I'm going to talk about today is more along the lines of what you can do for others....enforcing the "Creating Elmers one Podcast at a time" philosophy.

Did you watch the movie a few years ago called "Pay it Forward"? The movie starred Kevin Spacey, Helen Hunt and Haley Joel Osment. The plot of the movie was about a young boy who wanted to make the world a better place after his teacher gave him that chance. It was a feel-good kind of movie.

While amateur radio is not the only hobby in the world, it is one that for the most part does have a lot of "pay it forward" type of thinking among fellow amateurs. I would like to get you thinking more about this and hopefully ask you to do a little "pay it forward" action of your own.

In addition to amateur radio, I've dabbled in numerous hobbies. I love photography, I also at one time had a small model railroad setup. I've collected stamps and coins and I've tried my hand at geocaching. I also enjoy woodworking and collecting antiques. There are many other hobbies I've tried or have looked into over the years.

Of all the hobbies that I've been involved with, I've never seen the level of support which is offered from the community like I've seen in amateur radio. Yes, woodworking and photography as an example have more forum websites and yahoo groups than you can shake a stick at. Each of these have individuals willing to lend advice and share ideas. But I've never had anyone offer to loan me a table saw or an expensive lens. I have however, had fellow hams offer to loan me an HF rig, a tuner etc.

Now I'm not going to suggest that everyone dig out their spare HF rigs and go immediately loan them out. I understand that is just not sensible unless you really, really know the individual. I would use the same level of caution.

However, there are other ways you can help by "paying it forward". How many of you buy the new ARRL Handbook every year or two? I know I do...well almost every year. I picked up the 2008 version just after

I got my ticket in 2007 and I skipped the 2009, but ordered the 2010. I used the "pay it forward" concept and gave my 2008 version to a fellow ham.

What about the ARRL Repeater guides? I generally purchase these new each year along with the electronic version on CD-ROM. Again, I have "paid it forward" and given these to new hams.

What about that stack of QST and CQ magazines? Yep...these can be extremely valuable to a new ham just starting out.

What about that technician class exam prep manual? Ok..in this example I urge one point of caution. As in the example of the 2006-2010 technician exam manual, the manual is changing on July 1, 2010 since the question pool is changing. There still a lot of good info in the older version....but if you're going to give that to someone who is just starting to study for the exam, please let them know about the changes. But the general book is good for another full year as the question pool does not change until July 2011.

Now one might think...Oh Gee Thanks. You've given me a handbook that is two years old. Well...it's not like a cookie or a loaf of bread. The knowledge and information in the 2008 version is just as good to a ham who is starting out as the information in the 2010 version. But to the beginning ham, it can be even more valuable because while they are saving up for that new HF rig, they will benefit from having the knowledge contained in these awesome books and magazines.

Of course if you have an old HF rig just sitting in the top of the closet and you so desire to loan it out...please do so. I believe anything you have which is just laying around collecting dust could benefit someone else....even if it is just considered to be a loan.

So...how do you go about adopting the "pay it forward" concept? I would start with your local club. Many local clubs sponsor training classes to help get new hams started. While most make it a requirement the student purchase and have their own license guide book, perhaps if you just have a spare laying around it could be used to help someone who can't afford their own.

Of course the other way you can do this is as you speak to non-hams about the hobby and you find that one that just really sounds interested and you get the feeling they want to get started in this wonderful hobby, then give them your old study guide.

Please "pay it forward", after all that is part of what this wonderful hobby is all about.

Featured Website Segment

And now for our Featured Website Segment. If you're new to the hobby and currently don't own a HF receiver and just not 100% sure if HF is something you want to get into....then besides making sure you attend Field Day on June 26th and 27th....websdr.org is a website you want to visit and bookmark.

WebSDR.org is essentially a software-defined radio receiver (or in this case several SDR receivers) connected to the internet that allow many listeners to listen and tune them simultaneously. The SDR technology makes it possible for all listeners to tune independently of each other.

Please visit and play around on websdr.org .

Featured Gadget Segment

Ok...so I know this really isn't a gadget, but I already had my notes ready for the featured website segment and really wanted to tell you guys about this.

I know there many hams who simply don't see the point of Twitter, Facebook and don't get social media. As I have said about other modes and such, it's not for everyone. Social media is not for everyone and that is OK.

But....social media is a powerful thing and while in my day job I spent the better part of 4 hours cleaning up malware from a users work laptop that he states he received from Facebook.....social media can be very powerful when used correctly and responsibly.

On Thursday, April 29 around 8:30 AM Mountain Time, I saw a Tweet from Bob, K0NR. Bob lives just south of me in Monument, Colorado. Anyway, Bob's tweet read "Is there a way to lookup a ham callsign via text message"? After reading the tweet, I decided that sounded like a cool idea and I since I didn't know the answer to his question, I re-tweeted his tweet.

If you don't use twitter, re-tweeting just means that his original tweet which may have been read by any of his followers, could now be viewed by anyone following me. Within an 30 minutes or so, several hams who follow me had provided some thoughts and discoveries on the idea.

I'll share these thoughts and discoveries in just a minute. But first....let me take a stab at providing some insight into why functionality like this might be a good idea and some minor concerns. They are just minor.

First...why? Well...lets say you are out and about either mobile or portable and you do not use a iPhone, or other smart phone type device where you have mobile web access. You also don't have a laptop or other device with you. You hear a call sign on the air and you really want to know the call sign info of that particular station.

Or lets say you are headed to a club meeting and you know a fellow members callsign but not his name (sort of funny how that works), again you only have your SMS capable phone with you.

A third scenario. Again you are out and about and you pull into the mall parking lot. You see a truck with several antennas on it and immediately recognize it as being owned by a fellow ham. You park next to it and you notice a cool looking antenna that you had never seen before. The truck has the hams call sign on the license plate and you want to know who this ham is.

So those are a few possible uses of having an SMS call sign lookup available. But what about the minor concerns I just mentioned. Well...if you have an unlimited SMS text messaging plan then I suppose you can ignore what I'm going to say next. But if you don't or you are not sure....please investigate with your cellular provider. Perhaps performing an SMS call sign lookup a few times won't break the bank, but if you go overboard and you don't have unlimited or a large pool of SMS messages...it can get expensive.

Now, my friend and fellow Oracle colleague, Gerry, N2GJ found a website created by the Cleveland Amateur Radio Club. The CARC provides a Callsign lookup by SMS system. You can visit the CARC website, just visit MyAmateurRadio.com for the link in the show notes.

<http://www.carc.cc/component/content/article/63-callsign-lookup-by-sms.html>

You can perform the callsign lookup by texting the word HAMCALL followed by the call sign to 41411. So I would type HAMCALL space KD0BIK and address that SMS message to 41411. After a few seconds I will receive a reply message containing my name, my address, my license class. This isn't a bad setup. But could it be improved?

On Friday morning, a little over 24 hours after this ham saw my tweet he had developed what I think is a better system. Graham McIntire, KC5VQD created callbytxt.org. That URL is callby tango, xray, tango dot ORG. To use his system all you need to do is send an SMS message to area code 469.296.8991

with just the callsign you want to look up. It is really that simple and in my opinion easier since you don't need to add the word HAMCALL. You just simply text the call sign to 469.296.8991.

As I said before, this functionality may not be for you. If not, no big deal. However, if you find yourself occasionally wanting to know the name and location of a fellow ham, here's one way of doing it.

My Ham Adventures Segment

In just a few weeks my wife and I will travel down to Texas to visit with my family. I haven't seen my parents, my grandmother and my uncle (k5sor) since early October. I know it may sound strange....but I really do enjoy the road trip. Yes, it's a long one....around 15 hours behind the wheel but I enjoy working HF mobile along the way and this trip will be no exception.

Of course, I'll run the APRS unit all the way. This is more for my mom's benefit than for anyone else. She can watch the map and follow along without the need of calling me to ask "are we there yet".

As discussed in episodes 35, 36 and demonstrated in the video supplement to these episodes, I will also be able to view any other APRS stations while on my route to Texas. I'm going to closely monitor this and try to make contact via 2m simplex. If I see them on my GPS map, I should be able to work them on simplex if they are monitoring. I'll make sure to update you all on a future episode of how this worked out.

Mailbag

And now for our mailbag segment. In lieu of reading email messages on this episode, I'm going to share just a few of the Google voicemail messages I received since the last episode, episode 38. These are in response to the mouse pad giveaway compliments of Jim Shrine of The DXStore. Please visit the DXStore at www.dxstore.com and follow him on twitter.

The question I asked everyone to answer was what do you like about amateur radio. Again, these are just a few of the voicemails I received. I'll get play more next time.

Well this wraps another episode of The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast. We will return again next week with our QRP episode #5 and episode 40....should be available sometime in late May. I'm not 100% sure how the schedule will work out with vacation...but I'll update you through the QRP episodes as we get closer to the end of the month.

Until next time, 73 to all from KD0BIK.

This has been The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast. The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast is written and produced by Jerry Taylor. You may contact Jerry by email at kd0bik@arrl.net or by visiting his website at www.kd0bik.com/podcast.