

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

The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast – Episode number 59.

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

This is show number 59, volume number 5 with a release date of September 26th , 2012.

Hello everyone. My name is Jerry Taylor; my amateur radio call sign is KDOBIK and welcome to the Practical Amateur Radio Podcast...Creating Elmers One Podcast at a time.

This podcast is about amateur radio, also known as ham radio. For the past 5 seasons, this podcast has helped entertain, encourage, educate and inspire many individuals to get their license and has helped countless already licensed amateurs get more from the hobby.

If you are interested in the hobby and service of amateur radio, already currently studying for your exam or have been in ham radio for years...I truly hope 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.

Our topic of discussion today has to do with "The well equipped ham shack". Now please understand, the well equipped ham shack doesn't necessarily have to mean an expensive ham shack. It also doesn't have to mean a large ham shack.

As you all know, I've been working for the past several months....actually the last almost 5 years on my new ham shack, podcast studio, home office and general man-cave. While the project from the time I began framing the walls to the point in time I moved my radios in was almost 5 years, the space sat idle at near the half way point for about 3 years and this year I really began to increase my focus and I've talked about the work along the way.

The long, multi-year story cut short....is while I've been working getting the space finished, I've also been taking time to design my well equipped ham shack.

Now something unique to my ham shack is the fact that it is a multi-purpose room. This space, will also serve as my home office, podcast studio and all-round man cave.

I work from home 1-2 days per week, so having a nice, quiet location where I can concentrate and work is important to me. It just makes sense for me to include these comforts in a home office into my new space.

The podcast studio....well....I'm not sure I would call it a studio, but being the podcast is an extension of my involvement in amateur radio, it is only nice to have this wrapped into the new space. I also plan to use this area to produce some new educational videos in the near future.

Finally....the term man-cave is perhaps over used today. But I really believe the description fits what I've designed and built. As this space combines an area for my ham shack and home office...it is sort of my own study. I think when I dim the lights and turn on the radios....it will be like operating in a nice, cool cave.

Now I suppose some might think all my talking about and blogging about the new basement ham shack, home office, podcast studio and man-cave is bragging. I can see where some people might think that. YES, I'm extremely proud of what I accomplished. My Grandfather built his own house and passed down his skills to my Dad who can build anything out of nothing. I've listened to my Dad over the years and I'm both proud and thankful to have had the skills to build out this new space. Again, I'm proud...but bragging...No, I would rather say I've attempted to just simply share what I've done for others to learn from. After all...perhaps one day you will want to take on a similar project.

Anyway...regardless of what size space you have to work with, there are certainly key items we all need in our ham shack and this ties into our discussion I've titled "The Well Equipped Ham Shack".

The obvious items you should have on your list are of course the transceiver and power source. As I've discussed before, this can be as simple as a hand-held radio which of course contains the transceiver and power source, (the battery) all in one package. Many beginner hams start out with this configuration. After all, it is the easiest way to get on the air as one box or package contains everything you need including the transceiver, the power source and the antenna.

Depending on where you live and the number of active repeaters in your area, a hand-held 5w transceiver connected to an exterior antenna will provide you hours and hours of amateur radio fun.

Of course, taking it to the next level....adding all-modes, and all-bands to the shack just increases the fun many, many times over. But the point to today's episode is there is more to consider than just a radio in the well equipped ham shack. I'm going to go through a list of items to consider. Please understand, I'm not suggesting you run out at the very moment and purchase everything I mention...just consider it and consider how it may help you get more from your operating time.

Again, besides the obvious transceiver, power supply, microphone, key etc. etc.

A Computer in the ham shack (especially if you don't already have one) can increase the WOW factor of the hobby for you.

Computer logging is just one element, but the introduction and exposure to all the various digital modes available to you is really the area I'm talking about. Even the technician class license allows operation of all the popular digital modes including PSK-31, RTTY and the ever increasing popular JT-65 digital mode.

Of course, a Soundcard Interface of some type will be required to get the audio to and from the transceiver and the computer. There are many different varieties of sound card interface options available. Everything from home brew options, kits you build yourself to simple and inexpensive to more expensive and more complex models are available from a number of suppliers. I've used and can

recommend both the Signalink USB from Tigertronics as well as the RigBlaster models from West Mountain.

I typically use the RigBlaster in the shack. It is connected to my Yaesu FT-897 which I use pretty much exclusively for data modes. The Signalink USB sound card interface is used in the shack from time to time, but mostly used when I operate portable. I can interface it with any of my radios including the 857, 897, 817 or the new KX3.

A comfortable and good quality pair of headphones or even a complete headset including boom microphone will certainly come in handy in a well equipped ham shack. There are many different models and types to choose from. Head phones and headsets are necessary if you are operating and the rest of your family doesn't want to be bothered. But equally just as important, a good quality headset can really help you pull those weak signals out of the mud.

Regardless of your operating style, comfort of the headset shouldn't be overlooked. If you do any amount of contesting, you may find yourself wearing the headset for hours.

When I purchased my headset, I purchased a hand push to talk switch to go along with it. I used it for a year or two and then I tried a footswitch. I'll admit I had to get used to the foot switch, but for contesting...especially when you are running a frequency, the ability to operate "hands free" proved to be important for working a pileup. I can keep my hands on the keyboard, type the call sign, move the mouse around on the screen and activate the PTT function with my foot. Like headsets, footswitch devices are available from multiple vendors and will certainly be welcome in the well equipped shack.

I know I said earlier I was not really going to cover the obvious items of the transceiver, tuner, power supply etc. However, the well equipped ham shack will have a power supply or multiple power supplies capable of powering your entire shack.

While I only transmit on one radio at a time, it's not uncommon for me to have multiple radios powered on. I might be operating digital modes on the 897 and have the 950 tuned into a shortwave frequency or perhaps monitoring 2m simplex from another rig. Having a power supply capable of running all the various devices I have in my shack is important to me and might be to you as well.

Before we leave the subject of power...the well equipped ham shack might also benefit from a power distribution panel. The RigRunner panels from West Mountain Radio include Anderson PowerPole connectors in a fused DC power strip. All of my transceivers are equipped with Anderson Powerpole connectors so I can move them from ham shack to mobile or portable use quickly.

In addition to the power supply and power distribution panel, I also use another device from West Mountain Radio called PowerGate. This small device has three sets of Anderson Powerpole connectors installed. One set connects into the power supply. The second set connects to a 12V deep cycle marine battery and the third goes to my power distribution panel.

When the power supply is switched on and I have AC household current, the power supply provides power to the distribution panel and trickle charges the deep cycle marine battery. If I lose AC power, the PowerGate automatically switches over to allow power from the battery to feed the distribution panel and the radios.

OK...now one more fact about power and the well equipped ham shack. In my example, I understand my 12v deep cycle marine battery will only last for a short time. The well equipped ham shack may have alternative means of power. In my case I've setup a power receptacle inside of my open-air courtyard. The courtyard is secure from the outside (meaning no one can access unless they either come through the garage or through my house or scale an almost 20 foot wall.

I can position my small gasoline generator inside this courtyard and with it being open air, it is safe to operate in this position. Connect the genny to the power receptacle inside the courtyard, start the genny and provide power to one single outlet located in my basement ham shack.

My genny is powerful enough to run a few household appliances including coffee pot, microwave, television, refrigerator and even a small space heater. It is also certainly more than powerful enough to charge my batteries and operate my radio gear.

Before I leave the subject of power, I know this may go without saying...but make certain you have adequate power....AC power I'm speaking about. You'll need plenty of AC outlets to run all the items we may need in our ham shack. If you have the luxury of finishing out the space (like I did with my unfinished basement) then this shouldn't be an issue.

I installed outlets just above the desk area which makes up both my amateur radio operating position as well as my home office work area and podcast studio setup. I also ran plenty of CAT5 cable for wall data connections. Each individual wall mounted data connection runs through the stud walls and returns to the basement utility closet. These are then connected into a Netgear gigabit switch.

While I have a wireless router which provides wireless data connectivity all over my house and also provides connectivity in my courtyard, garage and backyard deck....a wired Ethernet connection will provide a faster and more reliable connection to your home network.

In addition to a printer and scanner combo unit which certainly comes in handy in the ham shack, I also have a D-Link network area storage device attached to my home network. Installed inside I have two individual, one terabyte hard drives which are setup to function as a two drive raid. This allows for each of the two drives to be a mirror of each other. I can power the unit down and remove one of the two drives, then install a new drive which will automatically become a duplicate of the first drive. The drive I remove I can store either onsite in my safe or offsite in my safety deposit box.

So far I've covered most of the items you may have already considered and perhaps a few you haven't for a well equipped ham shack. Much like a pair of hiking boots and backpack for a comfortable SOTA activation, the ham shack chair and desk need to be carefully considered.

While just about any desk, table or even an old solid wooden door supported on each end can and do make great work surfaces in a ham shack. Having the ability to store and organize items is an area that I have seriously lacked in my old ham shack and one I'm correcting in the new space.

If you follow my blog, twitter and facebook postings, you've probably seen pictures of the progress I'm making on my new ham shack. You have probably noticed I have plenty of above desk and plenty of below desk storage. More about all this in a minute.

So again while even an old, solid wooden door will make a great table top...you need some way to better organize things. Otherwise you'll spend a half hour or more looking for that roll of stamps...only to find that they were shoved to the back of my desk and out of sight.

Now the chair you choose is perhaps the most important item you'll select for your well equipped ham shack. I think I've told this story on the podcast before.

Anyway, a few years ago my wife was down in the basement talking to me and I was sitting in an old office chair I had picked up from wal-mart about 10 years prior. I went to roll back in the chair and just about fell out.

It was nearing my birthday and my darling wife insisted on buying me a nice, comfortable chair. Again, keep in mind that I work from home 1-2 days a week and I'm fairly active in the ham shack in the evenings and weekends.

We went to all the usual places like Staples, Office Max and Office Depot. I tried many different styles. What I settled on wasn't the most expensive chair in the store, nor was it the cheapest. But it is comfortable and provides both up and down adjustments as well as adjustments for the back. It has nice padded arm rests and it looks like a nice manly chair. It's also heavy and built well enough that I don't have to worry about falling over in it.

I have a chair in my office at work which I wish was half as comfortable and I'm sure it cost a lot more money. Anyway...I love the chair my wife gave me for my ham shack and home office. I can sit for hours and of course that is important in a well equipped ham shack.

As we all know, amateur radio has different ways of opening doors to us. Many owe their careers to the knowledge they learned as a teenager....all because of ham radio.

One door amateur radio can open for just about anyone is the door of knowledge. If you operate HF, you are sure to find excellent band conditions one day or evening and work a country far, far away. I'll admit that I don't know where each and every country is located on the map. So having a nice sized map hanging on the wall is a great accessory and very much a great tool in the well equipped ham shack.

Another attribute of a well equipped ham shack is in the form of organization. Let me tell you....I truly struggle with keeping myself organized. I especially struggled in the old ham shack area of my basement. I operated from two 8 foot plastic tables pushed together in the corner. I had very little storage in the form of drawers and shelves. Stuff just seem to accumulate on the top of the tables and underneath.

It may appear I went a bit overboard with the number of above desk cabinets and under desk drawer units. I have 24 drawers and 12 double-door above desk cabinets. But the cabinet and drawers are really less important to discuss as far as helping to keep things organized.

Our hobby tends to cause us to collect many different pieces and parts. Some of course are large...but many others are smaller items. I went to the Container Store and purchased their clear plastic shoe box along with a few smaller sizes. I can group things together in these clear boxes. I can stack them. I have also labeled the outside to help identify what is what and can also visually see the contents inside.

You probably don't have to purchase the Container Store brand boxes, but I can tell you that my wife has used these Container Store brand shoe boxes to store her shoes in for 10 years. The lids still fit and the clear plastic hasn't faded or discolored. Best of all, the shoes inside stay dust free. My wife has a lot of shoes.

An example of something I've stored in a clear plastic box is my Signalink USB sound card modem. I typically only use this device when I operate portable. In my ham shack I use the RigBlaster and that stays connected and sits on the shack desk. If you own or are familiar with the Signalink USB device, you know there are a few cables required to connect the device and even more cables if you have multiple different rigs you may use with it. Finally, I've also purchased the jumper modules for both my Yaesu rigs and my Elecraft KX3.

Anyway....all these items are in one of these clear plastic boxes. No more digging and stressing over not being able to find something when I'm ready to go operate PSK-31 from a picnic table.

Another organization tip. Magazines.....I subscribe to many magazines and while I try very hard to read the content cover to cover, I find it difficult to throw them out. I may eventually have to come to terms with this...but for now I keep my amateur radio related magazines organized in some cardboard magazine file storage boxes I buy from Ikea. These are just simple, white cardboard boxes and I believe the pack has 5 boxes for just a few dollars.

One final tip and I'll close this segment out.

As you all know, I love sending and receiving QSL cards. I purchased an index card box along with some dividers. In this box I store my blank QSL cards, envelopes, stamps for US cards, stamps for cards going to Canada and stamps for all other international locations. I keep a stack of green stamps or better known as one dollar bills along with a few IRC coupons.

Also, when I receive a new card I place it in the box for temporary holding. I like to scan all my QSL cards and load the image into a 5x8 digital photo frame. Once I scan the QSL card image I then move them to another storage box. I also try to pre-populate all DX QSL cards that I plan to send via the bureau and have a holding spot for them in this box.

Perhaps you are thinking this all sounds a bit anal.....perhaps it is. But as with all my podcast episodes, these are tips that have helped me and I just want to share with you. Perhaps one or more may also help you. Thank you for listening.

### **Featured Website Segment**

Our featured website for episode 59 is the South Coast Amateur Radio Service or SouthCARS for short. I may have mentioned I joined SouthCars last summer (that is the summer of 2011) as I learned about an Echolink study group for the Amateur Extra exam.

The SouthCars website can be found by visiting [southcars.com](http://southcars.com) and I'll post a link in the show notes which you can find by visiting [MyAmateurRadio.com](http://MyAmateurRadio.com)

There website says it best, Grab a seat on the bus, sit down, relax, pour yourself a cup of coffee and ride along with us. The SouthCars net is on or around the 40 meter frequency of 7.251. Their net times are 8 AM until 10 AM and again 12 PM to 2 PM eastern. All licensed hams (general class or higher) are welcome to check into their daily 40m net.

Alternatively, SouthCars also hosts a VoIP Net on each and every Saturday from 8 AM until 10 AM and 12 Noon to 2 PM Eastern on Echolink and IRLP. All licensed hams are welcome. The Echolink node is 96140 and the IRLP Reflector is 9614. Additional information can be found on their website.

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### **Featured Gadget Segment**

Amateur Radio is all about gadgets. Some gadgets may directly relate to amateur radio and some may not. However, in most cases the featured gadget will at the very least be something that may help you in some capacity around the shack.

The featured gadget for this episode is the newest gadget I purchased for my new basement ham shack. I've been wanting to clean up and simplify the process for how I switch my two HF antennas between my HF Transceivers.

I've used the multi-position type switches from Alpha-Delta in the past. I actually do still use them for some functions in the shack. However, I still would need to physically move the coax from one radio to another in certain conditions.

I did a little research and discovered the MFJ-4724 desktop four position antenna and transceiver switch. This switch allows me to switch between four antennas and four transceivers and all without having to move coax from one radio to another.

The front of the switch has two knobs. The top knob selects the antenna and the bottom knob selects the transceiver. If I want to operate digital modes on 20 meters using the hamstick dipole, I just select antenna number two with the top knob and select transceiver number two on the bottom knob. It's really simple.

MFJ also offers a 6 position switch as well. Considering I'll never have more than 2-3 antennas for HF operations, the 4 position switch will serve me well. I'll post a link in the show notes where you can get more information about this MFJ product.

<http://www.mfjenterprises.com/Product.php?productid=MFJ-4724>

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### **Ham Adventures Segment**

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As I've mentioned in the weekly PARP Plus episodes, I moved into the new basement ham shack just in time to operate in the Colorado QSO Party. My goal going into the Colorado QSO Party was to have fun, enjoy the new ham shack and to make more QSO's than the year before. I'm pleased to report that I aced each of those goals.

I finished with 281 QSO's and while that probably won't earn me any new wall paper...I really had fun and the new ham shack worked out perfectly. I truly have a space that I'm proud of....but also is very comfortable.

The process of moving into the new space was somewhat of a two step process. Step one was to get the shack on the air for the Colorado QSO party and step two is getting it organized. This organization is still a work in progress, but I'm getting there.

Did you know there are less than 100 days remaining in 2012? I'm fully aware of the days remaining as I'm still going strong on my 2012 Challenge of having at least one QSO each day in 2012.

This 2012 Challenge of having a QSO a day has been both fun and challenging. If you are looking for something to challenge yourself for 2013, a QSO a day goal is certainly a good plan. I've accomplished more in adding to my DXCC count as a result of this challenge. I've worked and added more new DXCC this year than I have at any other point in the over 5 years I've been licensed.

While I've always been interested in the quality of QSO's versus quantity, I've had more QSO's in 2012 than I had in the years of 2008 - 2011 combined.

Now I haven't decided what my 2013 challenge will be. I have a few ideas I'm kicking around. However, I will not attempt a QSO a day in 2013 for the simple reason that my wife and I will spend two weeks out of the country next summer and while I hope to do a little ham radio operating while we visit Belgium and England next summer, I also know I won't be able to complete a daily type challenge.

Finally, the weather is starting to cool down in Colorado and this time of year is what truly gives Colorado it's name. I'm kicking around a SOTA activation for this coming Saturday and will be certain to post information regarding all the particulars on my blog site and on Twitter and Facebook. I hope I can work you.

### **Mailbag**

Mail goes here (none this month)

Well this wraps another episode of The Practical Amateur Radio Podcast. We will return again with episode 60 in October.

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Until next time, 73 to all from KDOBİK.

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](mailto:kd0bik@arrl.net) or by visiting his website at [www.myamateurradio.com](http://www.myamateurradio.com). The practical amateur radio podcast and myamateurradio.com are protected under the Creative Commons license. Please see myamateurradio.com for details.

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