

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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Regular readers of Charlie's Whistle know that Charlie in retirement has become a man of simple convictions and non-complex goals. He loves the challenge, peace and tranquility of fishing almost as much as he loves DXing. They are quite similar in many ways and both serve his need for competition the need we all feel to realize accomplishment.

Beyond providing for his family of course, his wants and needs are fairly simple to identify. One of his most clearly defined beliefs in Amateur Radio is that we all will enjoy our hobbies more thoroughly and be better individual hams if we combine our personal resources and energy in support of an Amateur Radio Club. He's always felt that clubs provided the most efficient means for anyone to learn and develop as well as most effectively provide communications service to the public. Groups of Amateurs are able to accomplish so much more than many individuals pulling in different directions. In fact, being an active member of two or three clubs is even better than one if a person is able to be a contributor to all the clubs. It is a simple illustration of our strength in numbers.

Some clubs emphasize public service, some contests, youth programs, some DX. Of course, nearly all clubs support Field Day in June and regardless of your choice of which club to join or even to visit during Field Day, you're guaranteed to enjoy Field Day. Many folks say that enjoying Field Day with friends is worth 100% of their annual dues. Well, that may be a bit strong but it makes a valid point for one of the values of club support. Nothing better proves that Amateur Radio is undeniably a team sport. However, despite recognizing these obvious facts, only about 20% of our licensees choose to become a member of even a single club.

Charlie has spoken on this subject to his club and others many times but doing so has always given him the feeling that he's merely preaching to the choir one more time. The polite nodding heads in the audience confirm that fact as they all agree with Charlie but obviously don't need any further convincing of the merits of club membership. At his last club meeting, he brought up a novel idea to try in expanding the overall club membership base. The idea was founded in the recognition of the fact that many hams dislike or openly reject the idea of joining a group or even being asked to add one more obligation to their already busy schedule and therefore decide to discount the simple value of supporting a club. I guess it's either too far down their list of personal priorities or more likely, it isn't seen in the correct perspective. Some that Charlie has questioned wouldn't join fraternities in college, any one church or even support any political party's campaigning.

Members join ham clubs for some obvious reasons such as fellowship and having access to experienced hams who can help them learn more about their chosen hobby. However, after a few meetings, some new members never are seen again and even though they may or may not continue paying dues, they decide not to come to meetings. All clubs want to promote activities to satisfy its members and make them want to come to all club activities. Videos, guest speakers, show and tell nights are all great but won't pack them into meetings. Especially during summer at the bottom of the sunspot cycle, club officers are challenged to think up any activity that will actually attract existing members, guests, new members and even local press. They can't merely sit and wait for better conditions if they want their club to grow, let alone survive.

Charlie's latest idea is to go back to basics. There's one thing that every current and potential new club member has in common. They always enjoy good food. A gathering that includes good food rarely fails to attract a crowd. Like the tried and proven method used by missionaries all

over the world, offer free food and people will come. OK, that's great. Now how can a club offer free food without going broke?

Well, one club probably can't but several clubs working together can combine their resources and accomplish it if they can pull the rope together and in the same direction. Combining forces takes advantage of individual special resources that will benefit the group as well. For example, in the DX Hill region, there are several ham clubs. One is connected to the local university, another to a major church, another attracts retired engineers of a large defense plant and a few others concentrate on public service and training young people to become licensed. Wouldn't it be nice if we also had one connected to the food industry?

Wait! That's it. We don't have a club connected to food exactly but the university has a culinary department, hasn't it? Surely, that's worth investigating. Charlie made a few phone calls and asked Mary to help by calling a few of her crafts friends to find some leads into the food business. A dozen phone calls and a day's time paid off.

One of the adjunct professors in the university culinary arts department is a ham and a club member. One of his students works part time in a restaurant. Mary found that one of her crafts group has a husband and son who run a food distribution business that supplies the entire valley with specialty meats and cheese. Another's daughter manages the produce department for a large supermarket.

Charlie sat and thought for a while. The facts are favorable but the management to bring these resources together and pull the rope in the same direction doesn't exist. Well, he could serve as that resource. He's never been known to be shy, especially for a cause that he feels so strongly about.

Charlie called each of these resources and found a day and time when they all could come to DX Hill for a chat. Food also served as an incentive to come since Mary's cooking is widely known and she would be serving some of her tastiest creations. It never fails to draw attention. The missionaries know it's fool proof.

The meeting resulted in a cook-out aimed at the members of all clubs in the area. Food was provided by contributions from the different sources available to the committee members. There's always extra food available. Most was donated but a few items such as soft drinks and paper items had to be bought but Charlie happily supplied that. The university ball field was selected for the event. It had plenty of parking and was easy to reach by car.

Nearly 200 hams and potential club members came and enjoyed one another's company at this all day event. Different club leaders spoke to the group and the district's Emergency Management Director paid a visit and enjoyed hamburgers, apple pie and an iced tea. In fact, many folks had such a good time that they could hardly wait to get on the repeaters and tell those who weren't club members about the grand time that they had missed. It's doubtful that they will miss the next club cook-out.

Ham radio is best enjoyed along with other ham friends. It is a team activity like baseball, football and even Field Day. Alone, a ham's enjoyment is limited to the work bench or quiet solitary pursuits such as early morning DXing. But, even recognizing the DXer such as Charlie, he was the one who saw the need to launch a program combining multiple club efforts.

It really works. In fact, it's a sure thing to attract people and guarantee attendance. The missionaries learned a long time ago that offering free food never fails. Good luck and Bon Appetit!