

CHARLIE'S WHISTLE

By

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The basic spirit of Amateur radio and the foundation of the regulations which permit our existence as private licensees of radio equipment state that what we do in pursuit of our hobby is in the public's interest. As a group, Amateurs can always be depended upon to provide service to others. Whether the service is large or small isn't important but regardless, our very reason for being, in the eyes of our licensing authorities and others around the world, is that we exist in the public's interest. This phrasing has been expressed many times and in many ways in the past.

Do you serve the public's interest when you pursue your ham radio activities? Are you a member of ARES, a club, handle traffic, hold any ARRL appointment, a VE, serve as an Elmer? Or do you simply get on the air every day and amuse yourself rag chewing or chasing DX? Bluntly asked, what do you do as an Amateur to benefit someone other than yourself? Honestly, think about this and see if you are pleased with what you find.

There are hams like Charlie who are always giving of their knowledge, personal Elmering, service to his club, etc. It's true that he loves DXing and his work every morning chasing DX is mostly self serving, one can say, but that's only one part of his day. Most of the rest of his day and in fact most of Charlie's life is spent helping others; tutoring new hams in learning effective operating techniques, learning how to build and tune antennas, how to understand the sometimes complex equipment that hams buy for themselves. In short, Charlie has always been a role model for Elmers everywhere.

At a neighboring club's flea market recently, Charlie and his pal of many years, Mike had been wandering through the tables and rows of "stuff", just looking for some perfect items to bring home. Of course, neither of them really need anything but sometimes a certain tuning knob, counter dial assembly, rotary inductor, antenna or power relay, power tube or simply a roll of new all purpose tape becomes irresistible and needs to come home with them. It's the fun of a flea market.

The other fun of a flea market for Charlie is the social aspect, meeting many of his friends and listening to the talk taking place on all sorts of topics. Some of the flea markets in the region of DX Hill offer speakers with programs on different ham topics; antennas, mobile techniques, emergency communications or any of many other topics of likely interest to hams. This particular flea offered a talk on emergency communications that was scheduled to start at 9 AM.

It was a beautiful sunny and warm Saturday morning and a large crowd turned out for the flea market. Many made their way over to the tent marked with a white and red sign stating, "EmComm Program at 9AM – Come and See How **YOU** Can Help Your Community". Charlie and Mike walked over to the tent. Charlie noticed that the majority of those filling the tent were old timers, like themselves. In fact, a few were using walkers and canes. In fact, the youngest person he saw was at least 50. He looked back to

the flea market area and saw many 20 and 30 something folks busily hawking HTs, magnetic antennas and transceivers with one another. None were heading to the tent. Charlie said nothing but thought that was simply not right.

He checked his watch and saw that the time was close to 9 AM and decided to stay and hear the speaker. A well groomed man wearing an ARRL badge started by introduced himself as the Emergency Coordinator for this county. Along with him were two men and a lady who he introduced as Assistant ECs in the county. All four of them were between 35 and 40 years of age, young to Charlie and Mike but not nearly as young as many who remained at the flea market, a fact that didn't get by Charlie. The speaker explained their role in ARES and how they had programs in place to provide emergency communications to several agencies when "all else has failed".

Now, Charlie would never draw attention to someone's age except that this time, it was stunning to him that an opportunity to give back some service to the community was resonating with the older hams and apparently fell on deaf ears among the 20 and 30-something Y generation folks. Is it just that simple, that children of baby boomers aren't as generous or giving of themselves as their parents or grandparents? Charlie doesn't want to think so and empirically, he probably could never find proof to indict an entire generation. Could the fault lie more in education or more properly, lack of same? I.E., don't they know how essential it is to give back instead of always taking? Could it be that new hams of the last couple of decades view their Amateur privileges as entitlement rather than a privilege that they must earn?

Charlie and Mike were standing in the back of the tent, listening to the speakers talk about their regular nets and training programs while looking over the audience. Most were paying attention and taking notes. One of the team was busy handing out paper summaries of the material being covered including websites to the latest free FEMA training, ARRL training and SKYWARN training. Charlie was given a copy and he found it quite informative. He found it somewhat ironical that the computer challenged generation here in the tent was being asked to take on line training through the Internet while the computer whiz kids were out in the flea market haggling over an HT or bigger power supply for their 70 watt repeater transceiver.

Charlie mentioned his curiosity to Mike but he couldn't come up with a reason. It was a puzzle to him. The talk lasted about an hour and most stayed until the end. A few even stayed after and asked more questions. It's great to see such enthusiasm among some seniors wanting to perform public service. It's the reason we have this license. But the senior members of our fraternity appear to be carrying most of the water. Where are the new hams? Why aren't they carrying their share? Of course, this is not to say that no one under 50 years of age was interested in hearing the talk, but they were a conspicuously small minority.

On the drive home with the back of the truck holding a few boxes of new treasure from the flea market, Charlie thought about the day and said to Mike, "You know Mike, I learned today that you and I are to blame for not seeing more younger hams interested in

public service.” Mike turned to Charlie and asked, “Really? How do you figure that, my friend? With all the Elmering you’d done over ...what, maybe four decades?”

Charlie just nodded as he kept his eyes on the road. “Maybe, I said maybe, you and I personally have done our share but as a generation, we have failed to make new hams appreciate the responsibility that comes along with their ticket. It’s only indirectly stated in one question of the Tech exam, as I recall and never appears again through to Extra. I don’t think it’s taught in the clubs and on the air to encourage all sorts of service to others, not just emergency communications program but Elmering, teaching classes, doing show and tell demos at your club to show, best ways to solder a coax connector, construct a dipole and explain what it is, show patience with new operators who get nervous on the air, all sorts of ways. We older hams could be a lot more focused on educating newer hams to help fellow hams. We learned it when we started but many new hams haven’t. We must step up and do it.”

Mike smiled. Once again, his old DX buddy had sniffed out a major problem and addressed it. By Gosh, Mike had to agree. Charlie was on the mark. What are you doing to give back to your hobby? Hold an appointment? Serve as club officer? Write articles for the newsletter? Teach classes? Are a Volunteer Examiner? Are an Official Observer? Share special expertise by serving on advisory committees? Donate to ARRL’s special effort programs? Are you even a member of ARRL? (You should be you know....) In short, do you look for ways to help or do you just wait for your phone to ring? Are you a one way street, with everything flowing to you and nothing the other way? Extend your hand to new hams and offer your help. They can use it and they will become better hams because you helped them. It doesn’t hurt a bit and costs nothing. Come on, there’s no good excuse.

Postscript:

Free emergency training programs are available from FEMA on-line at

<http://training.fema.gov>.

Essential training for anyone who wishes to be available for public service work are two courses that are mandatory to be accepted as a volunteer and participate in actual emergencies are IS-100 and IS-700 on National Incident Management System (NIMS)

IS-100.a Introduction to Incident Command System,

<http://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/is100a.asp>

IS-700.a NIMS An Introduction

<http://training.fema.gov/emiweb/is/is700a.asp>

Go to these websites and take the courses. Become FEMA certified for your future volunteer work. Each takes about three hours of on line time and is very well done. Under FEMA rules, volunteers in a real emergency **MUST** be certified in both of these or they won’t be accepted for any service. They’re mandatory and free. Go get them.

There are also new free FEMA courses available:

- IS-197.EM: Special Needs Planning Considerations for Emergency Management

- IS-26: Guide to Points of Distribution
- IS-836: Nuclear/Radiological Incident Annex

To complete these courses, go to <http://training.fema.gov> and click on 'FEMA Independent Study' in the green bar. Scroll down to the bottom of the page to see all of our new courses or click on 'ISP Course List' in the red box to see all courses that are available.