



The Northeastern Indiana Amateur Radio Association has been in existence since 1939. Club members gather for a 1940 dinner at the Fee Restaurant in Waterloo. Seated, from the left, are George Sucher, Orris Wise, Robert Tripcony, John Huntoon, Pete Sherman, Bob Fuller, King Oberlin, Keith Free, Guy Westphal, Harold Stevens and Owen (Gabe) Elson. In back are Howard Clark, George Capon, Don Barcus, E.V. Minnear, Ivory Olinghouse, Carl Stallman, Charles Miser and William Kail. Today, the club has more than 100 members.



Amateur radio operators or "hams," make connections with fellow hams around the world during Field Day. The goal of Field Day is for operators to contact as many stations as possible and to learn how to operate radio gear in abnormal or less than ideal conditions.

Local club was created in 1939

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Today, with a few keystrokes or buttons, we can communicate with people around the world.

Imagine, however, that the cell towers and internet are down. With amateur radio, communication is still possible.

The only real limit to amateur radio is your imagination, according to John Maag, call sign KD9QDI, and John Chalmers, call sign W9GOO. They have taken different

paths in amateur radio, but explain there are many avenues to pursue.

"One thing about this hobby is there's multiple hobbies within the hobby," Chalmers said. "What John Maag does is very different from what this John does."

"I mostly do CW, which is Morse code these days," Chalmers continued.

"I do a lot of experimenting, setting up different scenarios," Maag said. "The latest one we're working on now is we're building a satellite tracker because we have 18 satellites up – the hams do – and they have repeaters on them."

"We're trying to track them and talk around the world with that," he explained.

How important are ham radio operators? In the 2011 earthquake and subsequent tsunami that affected Japan, the first communication to the outside world came from a ham radio operator, Chalmers noted. Ham radio operators have also played important roles in reaching loved ones from families in North Carolina affected by Hurricane Helene.

Beginnings in amateur radio

Chalmers obtained his first license in 1963 and is in his 61st year of amateur radio. He is the former president of the Northeastern Indiana Amateur Radio Association (NIARA).

"It all started when my folks got me a little receiver kit where you assemble it yourself, and you could tune around on the short wave bands," Chalmers said. "After that, I was getting more and more interested and found a couple of guys my age

that were already into it, and they helped me get in and get going."

At the time, Chalmers lived in Findlay, Ohio, which also had a radio club while he was in high school.

"They treated me just like adults. As soon as I got licensed – they had their own clubhouse – I could ride my bicycle down to the clubhouse, get in and operate and I had no equipment."

"I went onto college and majored in electrical engineering," Chalmers said.

Maag was owner of a communications company, Micro Tech MTI, for 22 years before retiring and selling his business to Nextel. He has been in amateur radio for four years.

"I moved up to a lake cottage for a while and then came back and built a house here," he said.

Maag became interested in amateur radio while delivering some wire to Jeff DeLucenay, KB9QG, a technical specialist and vice president of the NIARA. "He talked me into it. He got me involved and it went from there," Maag said.

Far reaching opportunities

"I'm more into the digital part of that because my company had 800 MHz throughout the tri-state (area), and I've always liked the digital part of it."

"The Morse code that I do is really old technology, with Morse code keys, no computer assistance," Chalmers said. "That's what I do mostly, although I do some digital modes as well."

"I don't think you'll find any two hams that do the hobby the same way."

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During the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Festival, members of the Northeastern Indiana Amateur Radio Association were on the air promoting activities such as historical events and for not-for-profits using a special call sign, K9A, for the activity. NIARA members were also able to communicate with former festival attendees who are no longer able to travel.



Amateur radio operators demonstrate their hobby for a group of Boy Scouts during a recent event.

Page layout by Jenney Wren Tuttle



Amateur radio is a diverse hobby that all ages can enjoy.



Hamfest is an annual event put on by the Northeastern Indiana Amateur Radio Association. Visitors visit the many vendor spaces looking for equipment and to trade stories.

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Chalmers explained amateur television and the ability to send faces over radio waves as examples. "It's all over the map," he said.

"They also have what we call Winlink," Maag said. "We can send messages via Winlink. Basically, it's digital sending a message from one person to another. It's also hooked to the internet so it can pass on down the line until it gets to the person."

"We can send email radio to radio," Chalmers said. "That's the simple version. If you have a gateway, you can send it to the gateway and then the gateway will put it on the internet and then you can send an email from a radio. I can send one to you for example, and it would get to your computer here in the office. We have that capability within the club."

Communicate anywhere, any time

The NIARA, which was established Oct. 21, 1939, has more than 100 members. "There's not many organizations in Auburn that are 85 years old," Chalmers said. "That's a good strong number."

The NIARA owns a communication trailer and repeater system, both of which can be used at special events, he added. The repeater system enables hams to legally communicate in their cars.

"It's illegal in the state of Indiana to be holding a cell phone (in a car), but it's legal in the state of Indiana to be holding a microphone," Chalmers explained. "If you're a licensed

amateur radio operator, you can hold a microphone and you can have a conversation while you're driving around.

"A lot of the amateurs in the area are equipped with mobile radios. It goes to the repeater and the repeater rebroadcasts the signal out," he added.

"I can be driving around and talk with somebody down in Huntington, up in Angola or wherever, with a low-power transceiver in the car."

"Digitally, I can do the same thing pretty much," Maag said. "I can talk around the world with it from my car."

Club activities

NIARA members participate in several events throughout the year.

Each year, during the fourth weekend in June, the American Radio Relay League — the national association for amateur radio in the U.S., representing more than 170,000 FCC-licensed amateur operators — conducts "ARRL Field Day."

During this event, thousands of radio amateurs gather with their clubs, groups or friends to operate from remote locations. The event serves as practice for emergencies, or as a picnic, an informal contest, and fun.

The goal of Field Day is to contact as many stations as possible and to learn how to operate radio gear in abnormal and less than optimal conditions.

In July, the club hosted "Auburn Hamfest" at the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Automobile Museum.

The event featured vendor spaces and a "talk-in."

During the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Festival, the club established a station with the special call sign, K9A, with which it promoted the festival. Ham operators were able to reach out to people who are no longer able to attend. During the weekend, operators made over 2,900 contacts, reaching all 50 states plus Puerto Rico and 45 countries.

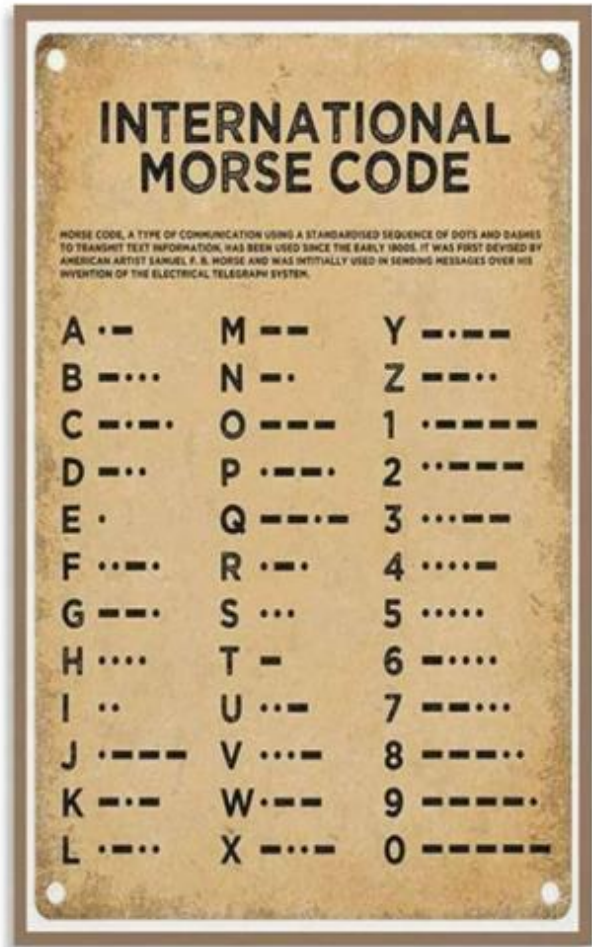
Membership, training class

The club is in the midst of a membership drive. Earlier this month, the club launched a training class for the first level of license, called the technician class. Other ham licenses are general and amateur extra.

The technician is for an entry-level amateur operator and are licensed through the Federal Communications Commission. Based on the license, operators are given frequency bands on which they can operate. A Morse code class is being organized to take place in February.

"We welcome everybody," Chalmers said. "We have members that are non-hams that are members that are hoping to become hams and we help them get going."

For more information, contact Jeff DeLucenay at license@yahoo.com. For more information about the NIARA, visit w9ou.org. The club also has a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/W9OU.ORG>.



The Straight Key Century Club is the most active group of mechanical key Morse code radiotelegraph operators in the world. The group was established in 2006 and boasts thousands of members around the globe.



A group of amateur radio operators participate in a training class. There are three levels of licensing in amateur radio: technician, general and amateur extra. The NIARA is currently in the midst of a technician class.



An amateur radio operator stands outside the Northeastern Indiana Amateur Radio Association's communications trailer during one of many events the group hosts throughout the year.