The
COMMUNICATOR
The Tamiami Amateur Radio Club • Venice, Florida
AUGUST 2004

– PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE –

(Ed. Note: John-VE6AIV is at his new lakeside home, which does not have telephone or Internet access to send an August message. We went back a few years to another time when John was sharing his thoughts with us, and offer the following, as we think its message is always pertinent.)

Back in Canada a lot of hams do a poor job of installing PL-259 connectors onto their coaxial cables, but they seem to get away with it. However, here in Florida, because of the humidity and moisture problems, it is imperative that we do this job correctly. My friend Gerry-VE6GLF showed me a trick for installing these connectors with the use of a small tubing cutter of the type that is normally used for cutting copper water pipe. I thought I would pass along this info to our members in order to help avoid potential problems.

Prepare the body of the PL-259 connector by using a small round file to roughen the metal around the solder holes. If you are using the newer silver-coated connectors this may not be necessary. Tin the area around each hole, but do not get solder inside the body or onto the threads. Next, remove 1-1/4" of the outer jacket of the coax by using a sharp knife. Be careful not to damage the braided shield. Now lightly tin the exposed braid, but try not to melt the inner dielectric. By use of the tubing cutter, cut through the tinned braid 5/8" from the end of the cable. Then cut through the exposed dielectric, 1/16" from the end of the braid. The tubing cutter or knife may be used for this step. The easiest way we have found to remove this piece of dielectric is to grasp it with a pair of pliers and twist it in one direction while slowly pulling it off the center conductor.

At this point, you must remember to slide the outer barrel of the connector onto the coax–if you have trouble remembering this perhaps we will write an article on how to unsolder connectors! Thread the connector all the way onto the cable, such that the tinned braid is visible through the holes in the connector. First solder the braid to the connector through all the holes that were previously tinned. Then carefully solder the connector pin to the center conductor of the coax, making sure that there is no solder on the outside of the pin. Insure that you only use enough heat to insure good solder flow. Remove any excess flux and use an ohm meter to check for continuity and shorts. If you follow these instructions, you will have a connection that will last for years.

73 de John - VE6AIV

– AUGUST MEETING –

The August TARC meeting will be at **6:00 PM** on Thursday, **12 August 2004** in the "Community Room" of The Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice, 601 South Tamiami Trail (Business US 41), across from the Bon Secours Hospital. Following the business meeting, a video of interest will be shown. Attendance was pretty light in July, so please try to get out for this meeting and show your continued support of TARC.

– TARC CALL SIGN BADGES –

Through the efforts of Marty Horowitz-W4MHH, a standardized TARC call sign badge has been designed and made available, at no cost, to all TARC members listed in the 28 May 2004 membership roster. These badges are being distributed locally to the TARC members who attend our Tuesday or Friday breakfasts and our monthly meetings. Badges will be mailed to those members who do not attend these functions. As our Snowbird members undoubtedly have little need for their TARC badges while up north, they will receive their badges upon their return to the area. Members who have joined the TARC subsequent to the roster date will receive their badges in the near future.

– UPCOMING TECHNICIAN CLASS –

A Technician Class training course will be offered, beginning 05 August 2004, at the Red Cross building, 2001 Cantu Court, Sarasota. The weekly classes will start at 6:30 PM and run for five weeks, with the sixth week being devoted to an Exam session, open to all. Tuition cost is $30 for the course, to cover the cost of training materials and a CD/ROM. If you know anyone who might be interested, have them call 685-2081 for further information and to register.

- CALL SIGN STATUS –

As of 11 July 2004, call signs issued sequentially in the Fourth District were up to:

Extra	General/Technician
AI4GC	KI4GGX

(From Vanity HQ Web site)

"The plea of necessity, that eternal argument of all conspirators." - William Henry Harrison, US President, *Letter to Simon Bolivar*, 27 September 1829

TAMIAMI AMATEUR RADIO CLUB
Minutes of the Meeting
08 July 2004

Vice President Peter Knorr-N2IZD called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM and led the pledge of allegiance to the US flag. Diana Gregory and Dan Anderson-KI4FZA, both of Venice, were welcomed as new members. West Central Florida Section Manager Dave Armbrust-AE4MR was welcomed as a visitor.

MINUTES - Bob Preston-N4CTC moved to forego reading of the minutes of the 10 June meeting which were published in the July issue of *The Communicator*, seconded by Charlie Covell-AG4TT, and passed.

CORRESPONDENCE - None

TREASURER'S REPORT - Treasurer Bob Officer-WA6WAY reported the 30 Jume account balance was $4,153.59. Outstanding checks for expenditures are $56.24 for printing and postage, and $118.00 for insurance. With $30.00 cash on hand, the 08 July account balance is $4,009.35.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

SUNSHINE - Bill Rockwood-KE4ZAK reported that Ken Truran-KC8BI is not improving and that he is now under hospice care. Marty Horowitz-W4MHH has been hospitalized due to loss of blood.

VE TESTING - There will not be a VE session this coming Saturday.

REPEATER/TECHNICAL - No action has been taken regarding addition of a PL tone, as there is no access to the site until Eddie Palmer-K4JP returns to Venice.

FIELD DAY - Six TARC members participated in the joint effort of Englewood ARS and Tamiami ARC, with over 600 QSOs being made. No report available on the SERC Field Day effort.

CLUB GRANTS AND DONATIONS - Bob-WA6WAY reported that the paperwork is still being processed to transfer the decommissioned Red Cross communications trailer to the TARC.

LIAISON TO SERC/ARES/RACES/RED CROSS - Nothing offered.

LIAISON TO FGCARC - A volunteer is needed to attend at least two meetings a year in order for the TARC to remain an active member of FGCARC.

LIAISON TO QCWA - Peter Pesa-N4RD reported that eight members and friends of Suncoast Chapter 53 attended the 07 July informal lunch at the Panda Pavilion in Venice.

OLD BUSINESS -Marty Horowitz-W4MHH has received the new TARC call sign badges, and there has been some limited distribution to members at breakfasts and club meetings. Further distribution will be made by mail to those members who do not attend either function. Snowbirds will receive their badges upon return to the area.

Follow up is needed regarding monthly participation in the WENG amateur radio program.

NEW BUSINESS - None

ADJOURNMENT - The meeting was adjourned at 6:53 PM. There were nine members and one visitor present.

PROGRAM - ARRL WCF Section Manager Dave Armbrust-AE4MR discussed current events within the Section and highlighted the current status of BPL, to the extent to which he has been informed. Dave also discussed ways by which our TARC repeater could be relicensed to the TARC.

Peter Pesa-N4RD, Secretary Pro Tem

– NOTABLE SILENT KEYS –

Marlon Brando-KE6PZH/FO8GJ - One of the best known names in cinema died 01 July 2004 at the age of 80. Brando held a US General Class license and was on the air occasionally over the years as FO8GJ from his private island in French Polynesia. In a 1994 interview with Larry King, Brando affirmed his continued interest in ham radio and said it provided him the opportunity to just be himself. Brando was nominated for eight Academy Awards and won twice. *(Your editor considers "The Wild One" and "One Eyed Jacks"–the only movie Brando also directed–to be his best. He watched "The Wild One" seven times in the theater!)* (From *The ARRL Letter, Vol. 23, No. 28)*

John D. Kraus-W8JK - Radio astronomer, antenna designer, teacher, cosmic explorer and author, Kraus died 18 July at age 94. Kraus is perhaps best known for his bidirectional wire beam antenna, often dubbed the '8JK array. Other important Kraus designs include the corner reflector and helix antennas. First licensed as 8AFJ, he was the father of the "Big Ear" radio telescope. Kraus joined the faculty of Ohio State University in 1946 and served as a professor of electrical engineering and astronomy, where he founded the OSU Radio Observatory. Kraus's classic textbook, "Antennas", now in its third edition, has been an engineering school staple for decades. In 1996 the Dayton Hamvention honored Kraus as the recipient of its Special Achievement Award, and in 2001 *CQ* named Kraus to the inaugural class of its Amateur Radio Hall of Fame. (From *The ARRL Letter, Vol. 23, No. 29*)

– UPCOMING HAMFESTS –

14 Aug Fort Pierce ARC, at Indian River Community College, 3209 Virginia Ave., Fort Pierce. SR 70 to 35th Street. TI: 147.345 (107.2 Hz PL tone); Info: Bill-N4XEO, 772-461-7275

28 Aug Tampa ARC, at Tampa ARC Operation Center, 7801 N. 22nd St, Tampa. I-275 to Sligh Ave Exit 48, East on Sligh to 22nd St, left (north) on 22nd to end of road. TI: 147.105 (146.2 Hz PL tone); Info: Biff-K4LAW, 813-265-4812

"That there must be no criticism of the president or that we stand by the president, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but it is morally treasonable to the American public." - Theodore Roosevelt (1918)

CURRENT/PENDING DX ACTIVITY AND PROPAGATION FORECASTS

CURRENT and/or SCHEDULED DX ACTIVITY

COUNTRY - CALL SIGN	ACTIVITY PERIOD	BEAR-ING	HF BANDS and BEST OPENING TIMES (GMT)						
			80	40	30	20	17	15	12
Lesotho - 7P8DA, 7P8NK	Now to 06 August	110	**00-05**	**23-06**	23-07	10-11	10-11	NO	NO
Aves Island - YV0??	Now to 08 August	119	**23-11**	**00-24**	**11-05**	18-21	NO	NO	NO
Rotuma - 3D2EA/R	Now to 09 August	263	**06-11**	**05-13**	**04-13**	**01-04**	02-04	19-21	NO
Uganda - 5X2A	03 - 21 August	77	**00-04**	**23-05**	**22-05**	**19-01**	19-00	22-00	NO
Vanuatu - YJ0II	06 - 15 August	262	**06-12**	**05-12**	**04-14**	**02-06**	01-03	20-22	NO
Swaziland - 3DA0SV, 3DA0WC	07 - 11 August	106	**00-05**	**23-06**	**23-07**	00-04	NO	NO	NO
Guantanamo Bay - KG4DX	10 - 14 August	135	**00-24**	**00-24**	**11-05**	15-01	NO	NO	NO
Mozambique - C9/K4SV & VA7DX	12 - 17 August	101	**00-04**	**23-05**	**22-06**	19-02	00-01	14-17	NO
Seychelles - S79OA	16 - 31 August	68	**00-02**	**23-03**	**22-00**	**19-00**	19-23	21-23	NO
Liechtenstein - HB0/HA4XG	28 Aug - 04 Sept	46	**00-05**	**22-07**	**21-00**	**13-22**	17-19	18-19	NO
Faroe Is - OY/DL1RTL & DL2RMC	30 Aug - 10 Sept	32	**00-07**	**21-01**	**19-23**	14-20	15-17	NO	NO
Isle of Man - GB4IOM, GB4SPT	01 - 08 September	41	**23-07**	**22-02**	**18-00**	**15-21**	19-21	NO	NO
Lesotho - 7P8RN	03 - 12 September	110	**00-05**	**23-06**	23-07	00-04	NO	NO	NO
St. Pierre & Miquelon - FP/NN9K	10 - 18 September	39	**23-11**	**00-24**	**11-02**	**12-00**	15-19	15-17	NO

Updated 29 July 2004, based on 28 July 2004 *QRZ DX*, 26 July 2004 *The Weekly DX* and *K1XN DX Alert #174*

Notes: ??? = Call sign not yet known, ++ = Phone Only, ** = CW Only, NO = No opening forecast, **Time in bold** = Best Band(s) for opening
Long path bearings and opening times (if any) are underlined. All forecasts calculated via *W6ELProp V.1.03* propagation software,
<http://www/qsl.net/w6elprop/> by Sheldon C. Shallon-W6EL, with Solar Flux and K-index varied in accordance with NOAA 27-day forecast.

– SOLAR ACTIVITY DURING JULY –

During July, the Solar Flux ranged from783 up to 175, with a mean value of 130.1 (vs. 127.8 for July 2003 and 174.4 for July 2002) and a median value of 125. The A-index was ≤ 10 on 17 days during July.

While the first three weeks of the month were "peaceful" with both 17 and 20 meters offering good DX openings, that was to change. On 23 July, Sunspot 652 was looking right at Earth. The geomagnetic K indices were at 0 at all latitudes the previous day, however a coronal mass ejection from this sunspot at 1514 GMT on 25 July changed all that. A greater than 10 MeV proton event accompanied the long duration M1 flare and CME that occurred. While the effects of the CME were minimal, there was a strong solar wind in the range of 550 to over 700 km/second behind it, at which time the interplanetary magnetic filed pointed south, making Earth vulnerable to geomagnetic disturbance. On 25 July, the 3-hour Planetary-K index went up to 8 (equivalent to an A-index of 240!) and HF propagation was blacked out. The Boulder-K averaged about 4 on 26 July (equivalent to an A of 30), but the Boulder-A index soared to 129 on 27 July. By 29 July the 20-meter band began to recover, offering DX openings into Japan and eastern Europe. (From *Propagation Forecast Bulletin 30*, Tad Cook-K7RA, 23 July 2004 and USAF/NOAA *Geophysical Activity Summary 208* and *209*, issued 26 and 27 July 2004)

– AUGUST PROPAGATION –

During August, solar activity is expected to range from low to high levels. The Solar Flux should range from a low of 85 up to 125 on 15-18 August, and end the month at 90. The geomagnetic field is expected to range from quiet to active levels with minor storm periods at high latitudes. (From *NOAA Weekly Highlights and Forecasts, 20 July 2004* and *NOAA 27-Day Space Weather Outlook Table, 27 July 2004*)

Late August and early September is the most difficult time of the year for which to make accurate band predictions, as conditions can change dramatically from day to day. On many days typical summertime conditions will prevail, while on other days the bands will sound fall-like, with higher MUF during the day and lower MUF during nighttime.

During daylight hours, good DX conditions should be possible on 15 to 2o meters. The 17- and 20-meter signals will peak during the two-hour period following sunrise and again during the late afternoon. Best DX openings will be into the Southern Hemisphere. Between sunset and sunrise, 20 meters is expected to be the best band, restricted however by the lower solar activity. Fairly good openings are also expected on 30 through 80 meters despite the high static level at times.

Conditions should be *Above Normal* 1, 6-7, 10, 15-17, 24 and 28 August; and *High Normal* 2-5, 8, 11-14, 18-21, 23, 25-27 and 29-31 August. (From "Propagation", Tomas Hood-NW7US, August 2004 *CQ*)

– AVES ISLAND DXPEDITION –

Aves Island, the Venezuelan possession in the eastern Caribbean hasn't been on the air since 1994, and ranks worldwide as 9th most wanted on phone; 10th on CW; and 14th on RTTY. In 1978 the Venezuelan Navy established the Simon Bolivar Scientific-Military Base on Aves. On 30 July an international team of 15 operators set sale for the island, landing there about 2230 GMT 31 July. Four rigs with amplifiers will pump RF into monoband vertical antennas on HF and beams on VHF/UHF. Split operation on the "stan-dard DX" and IOTA frequencies. QSL via KB9NAN. Better work it, for "who knows?" (From 21 July 2004 *QRZ DX* and 31 July QSO with YV5AJ/MM, en route to the island.)

CONTESTS & ACTIVITIES

Contest/Special Event	Times/Dates	Bands/Modes	QSO With	Exchange
North American QSO Party	1800 GMT 07 August 1800 GMT 08 August	80 - 10 Meters Meters CW Only	North American countries, states, provinces, territories	Name + QTH
SARL HF DX Contest	1330 GMT 08 August 1730 GMT 08 August	80 - 20 Meters Phone Only	South African Stations Only	R/S + Serial Number
Ten-Ten International Summer QSO Party	0010 GMT 07 August 2359 GMT 08 August	10 Meters Phone Only	Anyone, Anywhere	Name, QTH, 10-10 No. (if member)
European HF Championship	1200 GMT 07 August 2359 GMT 07 August	160 - 10 Meters Phone and CW	European Stations Only	R/S/(T) + Year 1st Licensed (nn)
National Lighthouse-Lightship Weekend	0001 GMT 07 August 2359 GMT 08 August	160 - 10 Meters Phone and CW	Lighthouses and Lightships	Serial Number
Worked All Europe DX Contest	0000 GMT 14 August 2359 GMT 15 August	80 - 10 Meters CW Only	European Stations Only	R/S/T + Serial Number
North American QSO Party	1800 GMT 21 August 0600 GMT 22 August	80 - 10 Meters Phone Only	North American countries, states, provinces, territories	Name + QTH
International Lighthouse-Lightship Weekend	0001 GMT 21 August 2359 GMT 22 August	160 - 10 Meters Phone and CW	Lighthouses and Lightships	Serial Number
Keyman's Club of Japan Contest	1200 GMT 21 August 1200 GMT 22 August	160 - 6 Meters CW Only	Japanese Stations Only	R/S/T + Continent
SEANET Contest	1200 GMT 21 August 1200 GMT 22 August	80 - 10 Meters Phone/CW/Digital	South East Asian Stations Only	R/S/(T) + Serial Number
Romanian DX Contest	1200 GMT 28 August 1200 GMT 29 August	80 - 10 Meters Phone and CW	Anyone, Anywhere	R/S/(T) + Serial Number
SARL HF DX Contest	1330 GMT 31 August 1730 GMT 31 August	80 - 20 Meters CW Only	South African Stations Only	R/S/T + Serial Number

From August 2004 *Worldradio* and August 2004 *QST*.

– CLASSIFIED/FOR SALE –

(TARC members Don-N4ET and Alma-N4MML Fontaine are moving from their long-time Venice home to a villa residence in North Port. For the immediate future, their radio activities will be confined to EchoLink or 2-meter repeater activity. They are offering their station for sale, as per the following.)

ICOM IC-737 HF Transceiver; 1.8 - 29.7 MHz, 10 - 100 Watts variable output; General coverage receiver, 500 kHz - 20.995 MHz. With desk mike, external speaker and external 12-Volt power supply. Also includes custom built plug-in sound card interface for digital modes, CW, PSK31, RTTY, etc. - $450.00

Astron Model AS25A, 12-Volt/20-Amp continuous output power supply - $25.00

MFJ Model 948 Deluxe Versa Tuner II, 300-Watt capacity, 10 to 160 meters - $95.00

Bencher Paddle (black base) - $50.00

EZ-Way 40-foot crank-up, fold-over tower with ground post and Mosley TA-33 Jr. 3-element, 10/15/20-meter beam - $175.00

HyGain HAM IV rotator (only 2 years old) - $225.00

KAM TCU, upgraded to KAM Plus - $50.00

Kenwood Model TM-251 2-meter FM Transceiver - $95.00

MFJ 12-inch diameter 24-hour quartz clock (shows time around the world) - $5.00

OR, take it all for $1050.00, and get a used 5-foot operating desk with a 4-foot return absolutely FREE. Ideal for Ham Station with computer, etc.

All of the above may be seen at 252 Cocoa Lane. Please call 497-4014 to schedule a visit.

– THE VIBROPLEX "BUG" –

Well before iambic keyers came on the scene, the Vibroplex Bug was the keyer of choice for CW afficionados *(and your editor even owned one)*. This side-swiper key has been in continuous production for 100 years with only cosmetic changes. The following (from "Centennial of the 'Bug' - Vibroplex, 100 Years Later!", Mitch Mitchell-W4OA, August 2004 *CQ*) offers the "when and why."

During the 1800's telegraphy was primarily sent using the *hand key*, such as the WW II-vintage J-38 key. A good telegrapher could send 20-25 wpm with a hand key, however, they could only sustain that speed for about a half hour before numbing of the arm and wrist occurred. Over time the constant, unvarying motion of the hand key could cause

see VIBROPLEX, page 5

– KEN TRURAN-KC8BI; SK –

It is with deep sorrow that we report the passing of Ken Truran-KC8BI, who became a Silent Key on 17 July 2004. Ken succumbed to the cancer that he had been battling for over 11 years. When he was up and about, Ken was one of our most active and vocal members. Perhaps the following will acquaint our newer members with Ken and refresh the memories of those who knew this quite remarkable man.

Ken was born in Calumet, Michigan in 1926; his father was the founder and owner of Truran's Candies which did business from Michigan to Pennsylvania. Ken was a tool maker by trade but spent most of his time as a machine builder, and he was a self-made man. Ken was a Technical Sergeant in the Army during WW II, working on radios and communications. That experience led to his getting licensed as WA8DWJ, with his later upgrading to KC8BI and an Extra Class license. Ken was an active RTTY operator and participated in virtually all of the RTTY contests, and winning mention for his efforts.

Ken, his XYL Julie, and their family vacationed in Florida for many years, such that Ken and Julie moved to Venice in1990 when he retired. Ken joined the TARC and was a faithful member of the TARC VE Team, and a participant in the "Furry Skurry" events.

Kurt Truran-N8GQE, Ken and Julie's son, tells us that, "He was a great father to me, a faithful and supporting husband to his wife, and a caring, down to earth, practical man to everyone else. I believe the world just lost a wonderful person."

Ken's sense of humor did not go unnoticed. As Bill Rockwood-KE4ZAK comments, "A couple years ago, when Ken had lost his hair due to chemotherapy treatment, he pulled off a classic. Ken usually parked his car at our house and would ride with us to the Country Hound for breakfast. I offered him a lady's red hair wig to try on in place of the ball cap he usually wore. He got in front of a mirror and adjusted it, and then said, 'Let's go to breakfast.' When we entered the restaurant, he screwed up his face a bit and went to his usual seating place in a booth. It seems most of the other guys were wondering who he was, and were questioning each other. He was not recognized by anyone. Then, when he talked, his voice gave it away and we all had a good laugh with Ken. When we returned home, he asked if he could take the wig home so Julie could get some photos. We told him to keep the wig, but he did return it." Bill adds that Ken was always one of the first to volunteer to help with an antenna project, or anything else dealing with ham radio.

All who were around Ken knew that he always kept his unique sense of humor, in spite of his illness. Kurt verifies that observation, stating that, "The only bad thing he ever had to say was about one month before he died (when) he told Mom that 'he got dealt a bad hand.'"

So long, Ken; we do miss you, but we will remember you for years to come, as you were truly an inspiration to all of us who were fortunate to have known you.

VIBROPLEX, from page 4

temporary or permanent damage to cartilage, tendons, ligaments, nerves and muscles involved in producing the motion. Early telegraphers suffered from this malady, which they called "glass arm" for which there was no cure.

Necessity being the mother of invention, Horace G. Martin, one of the premier telegraphers at the time and a mechanical genius, developed and received Patent No. 767,303 on 09 August1904 for the prototype of the telegraph sending instrument which came to be called the Vibroplex Bug. The Vibroplex with its side-to-side motion allowed a good telegrapher to send effortlessly at 50, 60, or even 70 wpm for hours without becoming subject to glass arm.

The Bug resembles a conventional telegraph key mounted horizontally. Mounted on jeweled bearings, a long spring-mounted shaft extends from the basic key. Adjustable weights are mounted on this shaft, causing it to oscillate at a speed determined by the number and placement of the weights. While dashes were sent in a conventional manner by the operator, a contact on the oscillating shaft sent the dots. The operator would roll his hand, with a minimal amount of motion, to operate the Bug. Therefore, dependent on how the operator gave a rhythm to the dashes, a distinctive "fist" could still be identified.

Martin teamed up with telegrapher/typewriter salesman J. E. Albright in 1911 to market the Bug. This made good sense as it was the practice then for a telegrapher to furnish his own typewriter ("mill"). For some 65 years, Vibroplex remained in business on Broadway, NYC. In 1979, the company was moved to Portland, Maine by its new owner. In 1995, the present owner, Mitch Mitchell-W4OA, moved the production facility to LaGrange, Georgia, followed by a move to Mobile, Alabama in 1999.

While parts are no longer available for the really old Bugs, if a Bug was manufactured after WW II, Vibroplex probably has parts for it. A refurbishing service is also available for owners of old Bugs that have lost their "chirp." Let's hope Vibroplex, and Ham Radio, are around for another 100 years.

– NCVEC CONFERENCE –

The size, scope and comprehension level of Amateur Radio examination questions occupied much of the discussion at the 23 July 2004 annual meeting of the National Conference of Volunteer Examiner Coordinators, attended by 11 of the 14 VECs. However, no firm conclusions were reached as they await FCC action on Amateur radio restructuring. Bill Cross-W3TN of the FCC told the VECs that the FCC, with help from some law school interns, is currently reviewing approximately 6000 comments filed on 18 petitions addressing the Morse Code as an exam element and Amateur radio restructuring. Cross commented that a decision on restructuring or the Morse issue is not imminent.

"He indicated that some time will be necessary to review all the comments and glean some consensus on the number of license classes, whether or not to retain the Morse code as a

see CONFERENCE, page 7

– FINANCIAL ASPECTS OF BPL –

(While ham operators are leery of the potential interference aspects of Broadband over Power Lines, a major question for the power companies is, "Will it be profitable?" The following is from an article in the 24 May 2004 issue of MSN Money, *written by award-winning financial analyst/writer Michael Brush and published in the "vhf plus" column by Joe Lynch-N6CL in the August 2004 issue of* CQ. *BPL may never become a real threat, for it may never be truly competitive with other existing and forthcoming means of Internet access.)*

How the utilities may get into BPL

The most profitable way for utilities to offer BPL is to set up a telecom division to run the service outright. That's what PPL in Pennsylvania is doing. At the other extreme, utilities wary of getting tangled up in a new consumer service will passively offer access to their networks for a fee. They make less money, but the risks of getting bogged down in customer service is lower. Pepco is going this route.

The middle road–both for profits and risk–is a joint venture with a service provider. The marriage between Cinergy and Current Technologies is an example. But can a joint venture like this produce enough profits to move the earnings needle at a giant utility like Cinergy? A quick calculation raises some doubts.

Cinergy hopes to offer BPL service to 250,000 homes within three years, and it expects that 15% to 20% of customers will sign up. That suggests 50,000 customers will be paying $40/month, or $24 million/year. If the service produces 20% profit margins, Cinergy's 50% split with Current Technologies would give the utility $2.4 million from BPL. With 180 million shares outstanding, that works out to 1.3 cents/share.

Cinergy's take, however, could get bigger once VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) is added–not to mention video further down the road. Plus, Cinergy will soon start reaching out to more customers in Indiana and Kentucky. So, potential profits could be higher.

Even if it takes a few years to generate meaningful profits, utilities believe they can gain from BPL right away because it helps with automated meter reading and network monitoring.

Potential roadblocks

As good as BPL sounds, it faces several roadblocks. Despite exceptions like Cinergy and PPL, many utility companies are notoriously slow to adapt to new ideas. Next, a variety of "last mile" Internet access technologies compete with BPL–from DSL and cable to more cutting-edge options like fiber to the premises and WiMAX, a wireless network that transmits signals over as much as 30 miles.

And despite the warm glow from the nation's capital, there are several regulatory issues that could snag BPL. First off, ham radio operators hate BPL. A vocal group that's raised lots of money for the fight, they're concerned that BPL interferes with their radio trans-missions. Next, regulators have yet to decide whether VoIP should be treated like regular phone service. If so, that will push up costs and reduce interest among consumers. What's more, state utility regulators may slap BPL with surcharges to cover the cost of power lines.

Upcoming technical studies may prove the ham radio operators wrong. And most of the other potential regulatory snags will be resolved. The BPL field is still wide open–given that 80% of Internet users still haven't made the transition from dialup to any form of broadband.

To the foregoing article, columnist Joe Lynch-N6CL offers pertinent comments. In order for a joint venture utility such as Cinergy to have meaningful profits from BPL, the addition of VoIP service is mandatory. However, VoIP is far from being a viable alternative to conventional hard-wired phone service for three reasons. First, the audio quality and reliability of VoIP is inferior to that of other available voice communications. Second, law enforcement agencies have problems monitoring VoIP communications. Third, state and local governments have a huge interest in taxing VoIP communication. Add a tax on VoIP service to the franchise fee that may be charged to the utilities for BPL and what you have, in effect, is a tax on a tax, not to mention a revenue loss to the BPL provider.

BPL is not without competition from other "last mile" providers. What may be the sleeper competitor, however, is WiMAX, the potential last 30-mile provider. On 10 June 2004, the FCC made a move that looks like it has heard the concerns of the ham radio operators, when it created the Broadband Radio Service (BRS). Of interest, the FCC commissioners' comments regarding BRS are very similar to what they had written about BPL. It is within BRS that WiMAX will find a home. (As regards ham radio, there is a fast growing interest in High Speed Multi Media [HSMM] technology, and ten forums on this subject were presented at this year's HamCom in Arlington, Texas. Hams who are developing WiFi systems via interest in HSMM are getting in on the ground floor development of WiMAX systems, which can be transferred to commercial application on the new BRS frequencies.)

Considering these caveats, it would be advantageous for the power utilities to take a long, hard look at the economic sense of BPL–even with the potential add-on service. After all, it's the "bottom line" that counts in today's investment and economic environment.

This seems to be happening as, for instance, the broadband provider testing BPL in Penn Yan, NY is moving away from that technology. Data Ventures (DVI) now plans to use wireless mesh WiFI instead of BPL. DVI is partnering with Nortel to offer the wireless service. Penn Yan reportedly will get 10% of the generated revenue. (From *The ARRL Letter, Vol. 23, No. 30*)

"I feel for you, but I'm consumed with apathy." - Doc Velie (Walter Brennan) in "Bad Day at Black Rock"

CONFERENCE, from page 5

licensing requirement for HF operation, the proposed auto-upgrading of certain license classes and what to call any new beginner's license," said ARRL VEC Manager Bart Jahnke-W9JJ.

FCC Special Counsel for Enforcement, Riley Hollingsworth, told the VECs he's "really aggravated" to still be dealing with enforcement issues resulting from several 1999 examination sessions in Yucaipa, California "where Ves apparently sold licenses." The situation occurred, Hollingsworth said, because "VEC management was asleep at the wheel."

"It was a failure of imagination–a failure to think on the part of the manager about what he was there for in the first place," said Hollingsworth. In the Yucaipa case, he said, several volunteer examiners signed off on 250 examinations in a 26-month period. Following a 2000 FCC audit into exam sessions in Puerto Rico, Hollingsworth said, the FCC recalled 100 applicants for retesting, and only one showed up. Although Hollingsworth did not identify the VEC, both the Yucaipa and Puerto Rico cases involved the W5YI VEC, which referred the California exam session irregularities to the FCC after investigating on its own. In Puerto Rico, the W5YI VEC discontinued the services of all Puerto Rico VEs, except those associated with the Arecibo Observatory Amateur Radio Club, after irregularities came to light there.

"I can tell you that so far I have been a fan of the VEC program," Hollingsworth said. "But if we have one more case of the magnitude of the Puerto Rico or Yucaipa cases, that's going to change fast." He pointed out that the FCC does not have to accept the services of any given VEC, and he said if any VECs are uncomfortable with taking responsibility for oversight, following up and random reviews of their test sessions, they can stop being VECs.

"You have an obligation to remain awake at the wheel, and the point is not how fast or easily you can do your job, but how well you can do it." He said today's applicants will determine the character of the Amateur Radio Service in the future. "If your own VEs are running a license factory right in front of you, we are going to hold you responsible.

Hollingsworth concluded by saying that he expects the VECs to "add integrity to the process" and be vigilant to avoid future embarrassments and problems.

Bart Jahnke-W9JJ reported on the past year's Question Pool Committee activities, which included release of a new General Class (Element 3) examination pool. Jahnke repeated a call for input to the Amateur Extra Class (Element 4) syllabus, but he noted that any Element 4 review may be suspended if and when the FCC proceeds toward restructuring and establishment of a new beginner's license.

(From *The ARRL Letter, Vol. 23, No. 30*)

"The two most common elements in the universe are hydorgen and stupidity." - Harlan Ellison

– LEGAL LUNACY IN THE USofA –

TARC member Ed Watson-VE3SYW recently sent your editor an article from his local paper, the Kingston Whig-Standard, *dated 21 July 2004. Entitled "Legal lunacy: Some of America's weirdest laws" it was written by Stephen A. Jones, who has obviously put some time and effort into uncovering just how wacky some laws are in the UsofA.)*

It's illegal in North Carolina to plow a field using an elephant. If you take your elephant to New Jersey and tie it to aparking meter, make sure you put money into the meter. You'll get a ticket if you don't. And, if you should take your giraffe to Georgia, you should know it's illegal to tie it to a lamp post.

Every citizen of Kentucky is required by law to take a bath once a year. Yet, in 1845, Boston had an ordinance banning bathing without a doctor's prescription, while in Mojave County, Arizona, anyone caught stealing soap must wash himself with it until it is used up. And, in Indiana, bathing in winter is prohibited.

It's against the law for stores in Providence, Rhode Island, to sell a toothbrush on Sunday, but it's OK to sell toothpaste and mouthwash.

It's illegal to mispronounce "Arkansas" while in that state, but a man can legally beat his wife–but no more than once a month. In Los Angeles, if a man wants to beat his wife with a strap wider than two inches, he must get her consent. And in South Carolina a man can only legally beat his wife on Sunday morning on the steps of the State House.

Arkansas lawmakers have no fear of God, for they passed a law specifying that the Arkansas River must not rise higher than the Main Street Bridge in Little Rock.

The town of Chico, California had the right idea when it made it a crime punishable with a $500 fine to detonate a nuclear device within city limits.

In Alaska, it's illegal to look at a moose from the window of an airplane. And in Baldwin Park, California, nobody is allowed to ride a bicycle in a swimming pool.

In Indiana, citizens are not allowed to attend a cinema or theater, nor ride in a public streetcar, for four hours after eating garlic.

In Wichita, Kansas, at the intersection of Douglas and Broadway, motorists are required to stop, exit their vehicle, and fire three shotgun rounds before continuing on their way. In Maine, shotguns must be taken to church in the event of a Native American attack. In Washington, it is mandatory for a motorist with criminal intentions to stop at the city limits and telephone the chief of police as he is entering town.

In Louisiana, it's illegal to rob a bank and then shoot at the bank teller with a water pistol. And, in that state, biting someone with your natural teeth is simple assault; but biting someone with your false teeth is aggravated assault.

A Pennsylvania law says if a motorist sees a horse coming down the road, he must pull over and cover his car with canvas. If the horse is still scared, he must take his car apart until the horse isn't scared anymore.

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