

Club Station

Advertising at a Ham Radio Flea Market to Increase Club Membership

Even the most active clubs need to evaluate their membership numbers on a regular basis. In this month's column, Framingham Amateur Radio Association (FARA), W1FY, Director Sumner Weisman, W1VIV, shares how FARA, a club based in Framingham, Massachusetts, worked on fixing their gradually decreasing membership by advertising at a local ham radio flea market.

FARA was founded in 1933 and became an ARRL Affiliated Club that same year. This year, we're celebrating the club's 90th anniversary. Our club is quite active — we hold monthly hybrid meetings at a local public library, usually with educational speakers; we participate in ARRL Field Day; we have a repeater with two weekly nets and EchoLink capability, and we participate in various other activities throughout the year. Despite how active FARA is, we realized at a recent board meeting that our membership has gradually decreased over the years, and that it was time to find a way to attract new members.

Finding a Solution

After discussing a number of different options, we remembered that a radio club in a nearby city would soon be having its annual ham radio flea market at their local middle school, and this event is always a success. The flea market is held every February, when many hams are anxious to set up new antennas, buy new radios, and become more radio active after experiencing a cold, housebound winter. In an effort to attract new members, we decided to buy a table at their event to advertise our 90th anniversary and offer a special membership discount.



FARA President John Iwuc, KB1VXY, on duty at the club table during the ham radio flea market. [Photo courtesy of FARA, W1FY]

Event Preparations

For this event, we offered new members the opportunity to choose between two gifts: a free coffee cup with our radio club logo on it, or a \$5 discount on their membership dues (our annual dues are \$20). Additionally, I designed two 4-foot-high posters using Microsoft Word. One poster advertised our special anniversary discount, and the other displayed many of our club's activities to show potential new members how active FARA is.

One of our members handled ordering a table at the event. We requested a location along a wall so that we could mount our posters, but discovered that we weren't allowed to hang anything on the school walls. This meant that we needed to purchase easels with adhesive backs so that the two posters could be self-supported on our table. I transferred the poster designs onto a flash drive and went to a local Staples, where

they printed the artwork onto two heavy poster boards. I also ordered 50 color copies of each of the poster designs to provide as 8½ × 11-inch handouts.

The Day of the Event

We arrived early to the flea market location to set up the posters, handouts, and other materials, including a stack of FARA applications with pens, so new members could sign up right at our table. We were not surprised to discover that, with the exception of the food table, ours was the only table not loaded with radio gear. This was an advantage because the attendees had to pass by our table, reading our signs, to view the surrounding tables of radio equipment — we were in a great location. We also made sure to engage with them as they passed. Asking if they wanted to join a great radio club and get a free coffee cup managed to grab their attention.

Three of our club officers were at the table, and we all spoke to many attendees about the various activities of our club and about our plans for the future. The time flew by, and we were pleasantly surprised by the interest we generated. At the end of the event, we had acquired a total of eight new members who had filled out membership applications and paid their dues for the year. In addition, many hams took home our handouts, so we hope to get even more new members in the future.

Worth the Investment

We spent a total of about \$325. Our biggest expense by far was printing the posters, as the cost was higher than we anticipated. The two posters (mounted on heavy poster board), two poster easels, and 100 handouts (50 copies of each poster design) cost us \$277. But we expect to use these materials for at least one other ham radio activity this year. Additionally, the table at the event cost \$20. We had previously purchased a large quantity of the coffee cups, for about \$3.50 per cup, to give to the speakers at our monthly club meetings, so we already had these to offer as a gift at the table. Most of the new members chose the free coffee cup option (as opposed to the membership dues discount of \$5), so the total cost of the coffee cups that we handed out was just under \$28. We felt this was worth the expense.

When we divided our total expenses by eight (the amount of new members we received), we discovered

that attending the event cost the club about \$40 per new member, which is equivalent to 2 years of membership dues. Because most of our members remain in the club for a long time — often measured in decades — we anticipate having the benefit of many years of dues and participation from each new member. We feel that our investment in new members was certainly a wise decision.

Advertising our club at this local ham radio flea market was just one way we're focusing on gaining new members as part of FARA's 90th anniversary celebration. We've also created an ad for the ARRL New England Division Convention, Northeast HamXposition's convention book that promotes our new member anniversary special — a free FARA coffee cup to those who join the club.

Write for "Club Station"

QST's "Club Station" column is a designated space for clubs to share specific and practical ideas about what has contributed to their success, in the hope that the information will help other clubs grow and thrive. Visit www.arrl.org/qst-club-station-guidelines-and-profile-form for more information, including author guidelines and a Club Profile Form (this form is required in order for "Club Station" submissions to be considered complete).

ARRL Special Service Clubs

ARRL offers the Special Service Club (SSC) program for clubs that demonstrate that they're working to improve the amateur radio community by completing special projects, holding license classes, and working with local groups on events, among other activities. Visit www.arrl.org/ssc-application for more information about this program. Below is a list of new and renewing SSCs as of July 20, 2023.

Renewing SSCs

Tualatin Valley Amateur Radio Club, W7OTV Aloha, OR



Feedback

The September 2023 "Convention and Hamfest Calendar" has an incorrect date of September 9 for the Midwest Superfest in Chillicothe, Illinois. The actual dates for the event are September 16 – 17, 2023.