

started with a High Frequency radio and a small antenna. Besides simply making contacts, you can improve your skills and try your luck at contests or working on a variety of awards. There are RANV members who consistently do very well in this area in national and international contests.

Morse code

The code has always had a special place in amateur radio and a special fascination for its users. Even though it is no longer required for a license, you'll find many hams on the bands using code, day and night. To get started here you need both regular practice with a computer program and regular on-the-air practice. Some RANV members use the code as their primary mode.

Equipment

You can get a good handi-talkie, new, for about a hundred dollars, and you can get a perfectly working used one for much less. For your car, a used rig in fine working order, with an antenna, will not cost you too much more than that. For instance, you should not have much trouble getting started, with very reasonable equipment, for two hundred dollars.

You can buy equipment used or new at a local hamfest; there are a number of these throughout the year (for instance, our club sponsors HAM-CON on the last Saturday in February). Many hams also use EBay or a reputable online dealer. If you could use some help with this, we'd be very happy to put you in contact with a club member.



Debbie WIDEB, Carl AB1DD, and Bob KB1FRW with friends Amy KB1KXF and her brother Robert K1RFM, tuning around.



Alan KB1PNF on VHF.

Cover: RANV hams at the annual Field Day event.



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Making Contacts



What's next, now that you have your ham ticket

You got it!

Congratulations! You've gotten your amateur radio license. You must be looking forward to using it.

We are your fellow hams. We'd like to welcome you to the community — now it's *your* community also — and to help you to hit the ground running.

The essence of being a ham is to make contacts, and we'd like to make contact with you.

Getting on the air

The steps that you should take to get started depend on where you would like to go. Below we have sections on the most common interests. But by far the most important thing is to get on the air.

The easiest way to get on the air is with a handi-talkie. This is how many successful hams begin. Get on a local repeater, start chatting, and you'll find people who have interests like yours. Many people also get a radio for the car that they use during commuting, on a repeater or one-on-one. Below we have some discussion of where and how to get equipment.

Getting in touch

You'll meet plenty of friendly people on the air. As you tune around you'll hear hams doing all sorts of things, including people looking to make new contacts (that means with you!), as well as talking with their regulars. Feel free to jump in.

As part of the community, hams often form clubs. Our club, the Radio Amateurs of Northern Vermont, is an example. We are in Chittenden County, although we also get people from adjacent counties. We meet on the second Tuesday of each month for a presentation of some kind, often including a

demonstration, followed by snacks and chat. These are about practical how-to-do-it things. It's a good chance to hear about neat stuff that you might like to try or to ask questions about what you are trying now. We'd love to see you at a meeting. (Show your new license to get a year's membership for free.) For directions and times, look on <http://www.ranv.org> or the <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/RANV/> mailing list.

Another resource for you is our contact line email address ranvmentor@gmail.com. Mail here goes to club members who have volunteered to help you with ham questions and problems. We've all been beginners, and we know that sometimes a little help goes a long way.

Starting out

Below are some common categories of ham interests (although there are many more that we could have listed). Each has a brief description.

If you are interested in one of these, or in some other ham activity, that's great. There are RANV members who are interested in and knowledgeable about each of these topics, and who have volunteered to help others who share their interest. Please feel free to ask about it on the air, or at a club meeting, but in particular, feel free to write our contact line.

Playing with technology

Many people get into ham radio because they like playing with technology.

You may be interested in connections between radios and computers. For instance, on the repeater you may hear people who contact their local repeater, from there go through the Internet using a

technology called *EchoLink*, and come out on our repeater to have a conversation with you. Our repeater lets you make such calls out — give it a try.

Many people are intrigued by the new digital radio modes that allow you to make very long distance contacts even under quite bad conditions. These are still experimental and you could contribute to their development.

Other hams also like to build and experiment with electronics.

Still other hams enjoy communicating with amateur radio satellites, or through the International Space Station. You can go a long way with surprisingly little.

We have club members experienced in each of these things.

Public service and emergency communications

Hams have always been at the service of their communities. Locally, this includes handling the communications at events such as the Vermont City Marathon and the Essex Memorial Day parade. Many hams with families find this an enjoyable way to work together.

One way to contribute to your community is by being active in preparation for emergency communications. The key here is to be ready and trained to deal with what happens, sometimes quite quickly. There are national ham organizations, ARES and RACES, active in this, and local hams are affiliated with them.

Long-distance communications

Many hams love the High Frequency bands, for making contacts around the country and around the world (contacts outside the country are called DX). This was historically the first activity of amateurs. You could get