

Chicago FM Club Squelch Tale - August 2004

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THE PRESIDENT COMMENTS

The last few weeks have really been a challenge for many of us. The heat and humidity, along with the cooler weather have really taken their toll on all of us, but there's another challenge just 7 weeks away. That's right you guessed it, Radio Expo 2004. The first Wed. in September will be our last radio expo meeting; it seems just like yesterday we began planning for it. Here's where all the planning comes into play. The major things, like the contract for the fair grounds, table layout, and a number of other things are all taken care of. It's you the members turn to do your share. We will need people through out the ham fest for set up, take down, watching the gate, security for the buildings, and running various errands. So spare some time for the club, give us a call on the ham help line. At the August meeting we will begin taking nominations for the December election of President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. The incumbents will vacate the offices of Vice President, and Treasurer, so please consider running for one of these important offices. I hope the summer has been a fun one for all of you and I'm looking forward to seeing you all at our next general meeting.

73 de Phil N9PA

DZV's DITS and Bits by Tim, WD9DZV

NEW VANITY FEE GOES INTO EFFECT AUGUST 6th

The FCC has announced that the new Amateur Radio vanity call sign regulatory fee of \$20.80 for the 10-year license term will go into effect August 6, 2004. Applicants for amateur vanity call signs will continue to pay the \$16.30 fee per vanity call sign application until the new fee goes into effect. All applications received at the FCC on or after August 6 must be accompanied by the new, higher fee.

FCC CHAIRMAN REAFFIRMS SUPPORT FOR BPL

Speaking in Menlo Park, California, July 15, FCC Chairman Michael K. Powell again asserted that

broadband over power line technology "holds the great promise to bring high-speed Internet access to every power outlet in America." Powell's statement followed a demonstration of BPL technology at AT&T Labs

co-sponsored by Pacific Gas and Electric Company and AT&T. "What I saw today has the potential to play a key role in meeting our goals to expand the availability and affordability of broadband," Powell said. "The future is bright for powerline broadband. We'll continue at the FCC to explore ways to support this technology while protecting other services from interference."

ACTOR MARLON BRANDO, KE6PZH/FO8GJ, SK

One of the best-known names in cinema--Marlon Brando, KE6PZH/FO8GJ--died in Los Angeles July 1. He was 80. Brando appears in the FCC database under his real name, "Martin Brandeaux," while his FO8GJ listing indicates both his real and his screen names. Brando held a US General class ticket. He was on the air occasionally over the years as FO8GJ from his private island in French Polynesia. In a 1994 CNN interview with Larry King, Brando affirmed his continued interest in Amateur Radio. In response to a caller's question, he said ham radio provided him with the opportunity to just be himself. Brando was best known for his roles as Stanley Kowalski in "A Streetcar Named Desire," a dockworker in "On the Waterfront," and Vito Corleone in "The Godfather." He was nominated for eight Academy Awards and won twice.

BROADBAND PROVIDER TO DROP BPL IN NEW YORK TRIAL COMMUNITY

The broadband provider that's been testing BPL in the Village of Penn Yan, New York, reportedly plans to "move away" from that technology. The Western New York community of some 5000 residents has been considering various proposals with Data Ventures (DVI) to offer broadband service. A BPL trial has been underway in Penn Yan for several months. The village reportedly would get 10 percent of the generated revenue. According to an article in the July 28 edition of the Finger Lakes Times Online, DVI now is proposing to employ wireless mesh "WiFi" technology instead of BPL. ARRL CEO David Sumner, K1ZZ, congratulated Penn Yan Mayor Douglas G. Marchionda Jr and DVI for going with wireless broadband instead of BPL.

"Not only will your citizens receive better service, but a serious radio spectrum pollution problem has been averted as well," Sumner said in a fax to Marchionda and to DVI CEO Marc Burling. "We hope that other communities will be able to profit from your experience." Sumner raised the issue of interference complaints from the Penn Yan BPL trial with Marchionda last April.

The Finger Lakes Times report quotes Burling as saying that his company didn't feel BPL was "commercially deployable." He also cited issues with the BPL trial including security concerns and interference--which will not be an issue with the wireless system.

Burling told ARRL that the Penn Yan BPL system remains on line but would be shut down once DVI starts deploying its wireless system. As for BPL, "We are going to sit back and wait for an official ruling from the FCC and go from there," Burling added.

Penn Yan already has rejected two DVI proposals to bring high-speed Internet service to the community, the newspaper said. Village officials reportedly met again with DVI representatives this week. DVI is partnering with Nortel to offer the wireless service.

In a March 23 article "In This Power Play, High-Wire Act Riles Ham-Radio Fans," Wall Street Journal reporter Ken Brown described a "firestorm" of protest from amateurs when Penn Yan approved the BPL test plan.

ARRL also has learned that Energy East--a cooperative of New York State Electric & Gas and Rochester Gas & Electric--decided against deploying BPL in their Western New York service area. Energy East based its decision in large part on the high levels of radio frequency interference an engineer and company officials observed during a visit to the Penn Yan field trial.

On July 29, Grand Haven, Michigan, announced that it had become the first community in the US to deploy a WiFi network <<http://www.ottawawireless.net/about-us/press-room.html>> that blankets the city and up to 15 miles off shore in Lake Michigan with broadband Internet access.

For more information on BPL, visit the "Broadband Over Power Line (BPL) and Amateur Radio" <<http://www.arrl.org/bpl/>> page on the ARRL Web site.

ARRL SEEKS CLARIFICATION OF FCC RESPONSE TO BPL INTERFERENCE COMPLAINT

The ARRL wants the FCC to further explain its recent response to a North Carolina amateur's complaint of BPL interference. FCC Office of Engineering and Technology (OET) Deputy Chief Bruce A. Franca replied July 22 to an April 27 BPL interference complaint from Thomas A. Brown, N4TAB, of Wake Forest. Brown had complained of BPL interference to his amateur HF mobile station emanating from a Progress Energy Corp (PEC) BPL field trial in the Raleigh area. In his letter, copied to ARRL, Franca said an on-site investigation had concluded that PEC's BPL trial "is in compliance" with FCC rules and that the company's ham band notching efforts "are effective" to avoid the potential for harmful interference. ARRL CEO David Sumner, K1ZZ, however, cited evidence to the contrary.

"It is not at all clear that the tests and measurements taken by the FCC . . . established the absence of harmful interference to licensed stations," Sumner responded July 22. He said the League would like the OET to make its test report available to the general public or at least to the League for technical review and comment. The ARRL also wants to know what steps PEC took between April 27 and June 28--when the FCC began its testing—to address interference complaints from Brown and several other radio amateurs.

The FCC defines as "harmful" any interference that "seriously degrades, obstructs or repeatedly interrupts a radiocommunication service operating in accordance with the Radio Regulations."

According to Franca, FCC personnel "undertook extensive testing and measurements" of the PEC BPL system between June 28 and July 2. The complainant--Brown--says the FCC delegation never contacted him while it was in North Carolina. Franca says FCC measurements indicated notch depths averaging 24 dB below Part 15 emission limits, which he characterized as "sufficient to eliminate any signals that would be deemed capable of causing harmful interference, including interference to amateur operations."

Franca maintained that "in no instances" were signal levels high enough to "cause serious degradation, obstruction, or repeated interruption" of amateur mobile or fixed communications. He conceded, however, that notching on 10 meters was somewhat less effective at the low end of the band and said the FCC would instruct PEC and its partner, Amerperion, to widen its notch there.

Sumner noted that the Part 15 device operators "must eliminate all harmful interference, and therefore in some cases must achieve more--in certain cases, considerably more--than a 24 dB reduction in order to be in compliance." He also cited recent reports from amateurs in the area indicating that strong BPL interference continues in parts of the PEC trial zone.

Sumner told Franca that amateurs in the Raleigh area on July 17 and again July 22 monitored a BPL signal "at full strength and causing harmful interference" from 14.290 to 14.350 MHz. "Harmful interference" also was reported in the first 100 kHz of 15 meters as well as on the WWV/WWVH frequencies of 15.000 and 20.000 MHz and on several international broadcasting bands.

"Even in the notched bands," Sumner said, "the interference was still evident on ordinary amateur equipment." He said it's clear to ARRL that the system's Holland Church Road site--where the most recent amateur measurements were taken--is in violation of Part 15.

For his part, Brown--an engineer with considerable RF experience--said he was glad the FCC finally took some action but found some of Franca's assertions "very troubling." He told ARRL that his 14-page complaint cited interference "sufficient to mask a weak signal," although it did not register on his S meter. An active Amateur Radio Emergency Service District Emergency Coordinator, Brown said it's not unusual to have to copy similarly weak signals during an HF emergency net.

"I suspect the principal reason for their coming down here was to say they've actually done something," Brown commented. He also worried that the FCC was attempting to define a standard of "acceptable interference" within the framework of what constitutes "harmful interference." "If it interferes, it interferes," he maintained. Sumner also requested that the FCC clarify some additional aspects of its North Carolina testing and measurement activities.

"Until these points can be clarified," he concluded, "we trust that the Commission will not permit its conclusion to be erroneously represented as having given the Progress Energy trials a 'clean bill of health.'"

AMSAT "ECHO" SATELLITE OPENS FOR FM VOICE TRIAL RUN

AMSAT-NA's new "Echo" satellite (AO-51) has been turned on for general use in FM repeat mode for a trial period of about three weeks. During that time, command stations on Earth will monitor AO-51's power budget and adjust the UHF Transmitter B (TX B) power as needed for good battery management. They'll also be watching the AMSAT Bulletin Board e-mail reflector, amsat-bb@amsat.org, for reports of how Echo is working.

"We are most interested in hearing about how well Echo hears you and how well you hear it," said the Echo Command Team--Jim White, WD0E, and Mike Kingery, KE4AZN--in an AMSAT bulletin. White and Kingery note that this is a trial period of the FM voice repeater. The digital portion of Echo is not yet open for use.

AMSAT Vice President for User Services Bruce Paige, KK5DO, says reports of successful QSOs on Echo's first day of operation came from all over the world, including the US, Brazil, New Zealand and Germany.

A Russian Dnepr LV rocket carried AO-51 and several other payloads into orbit June 29 from Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. The 10-inch-square microsat, circling some 800 km above Earth in a sun-synchronous orbit, will permit voice communication using handheld transceivers.

The digital transponder and the store-and-forward BBS, are not yet open for general use. Initially, the AO-51 downlink transmitter was running at about 0.5 W. At that power level, AMSAT says, Earth stations will need a small directional antenna to hear it. If onboard power permits, ground controllers will slowly increase the transmitter's output during the trial period.

The Echo FM voice uplink frequency is 145.920 MHz, and the downlink is 435.300 MHz. The downlink transmitter will come on when it hears an uplink signal with a 67 Hz CTCSS (PL) tone for about 1 second, and it will stay on for 10 seconds after that signal goes away. "This operation is just like a terrestrial FM repeater with a 1 second 'kerchunk' filter and a 10 second hang time," AMSAT noted. Transmitter A (TX A), now sending telemetry, generally will continue to operate on 435.150 MHz.

AMSAT points out that Echo, which launched June 29, is still "wobbling a great deal," so the downlink polarization sense will vary.

The Echo Command Team says it expects Echo will be heavily used during the first few days of the trial period. "It is good amateur practice and common courtesy to let everyone have a chance," they said. "Echo will hear you as well as or better than any previous amateur FM repeater satellite."

With hundreds of stations trying out AO-51, ground controllers say they expect the transmitter will be on continuously when the spacecraft is over populated areas.

The Echo satellite project is still some \$8000 short of the \$110,000 that was needed to launch the spacecraft. AMSAT guaranteed the full fare by borrowing from its dedicated funds, which now must be repaid. AMSAT—a 501(c)(3) organization--welcomes additional donations to bridge the funding gap. Visit the AMSAT AO-Echo Web page for additional details.--AMSAT News Service

VOLUNTEER EXAMINER COORDINATORS DISCUSS QUESTION POOLS, RESTRUCTURING

The size, scope and comprehension level of Amateur Radio examination questions occupied much of the discussion as 11 of the nation's 14 Volunteer Examiner coordinators gathered this month in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. But those attending the National Conference of Volunteer Examiner Coordinators (NCVEC) annual meeting July 23 reached no firm conclusions as they await FCC action on Amateur Radio restructuring. The FCC's Bill Cross, W3TN, told the VECs that the Commission--with help from some law school interns--is reviewing the approximately 6000 comments filed on 18 petitions addressing the Morse code as an exam element and Amateur Radio restructuring. Cross informed the VECs that a decision on restructuring or the Morse code issue is not imminent.

"He indicated that some time will be necessary to review all the comments to glean some consensus on the number of license classes, whether or not to retain Morse code as a 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--borrowing a phrase from the recent 9/11 Commission report. 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 but 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.

Filling in for Question Pool Committee Chairman Scotty Neustadter, W4WW, Jahnke reported on the past year's QPC 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.

Chosen to serve on the Question Pool Committee were Larry Pollock, NB5X, of the W5YI VEC, Neustadter, Wiley and Jahnke. Wiley will chair the committee. ARRL Amateur Radio Education and Technology Program (ETP) Coordinator Mark Spencer, WA8SME, wrapped up the conference with a presentation covering youth initiatives, instruction, motivating teachers and schools, and related ETP activities. He also displayed various project boards designed for classroom use.

NORTH CAROLINA UTILITY ENDING BPL FIELD TRIAL

Progress Energy Corporation (PEC) says it's completed Phase II of its broadband over power line (BPL) field trial in the Raleigh, North Carolina, area. In an August 4 PEC internal memorandum made available to ARRL, the company said its program to "test the viability of providing broadband service to communities it serves" will wrap up by the end of August. The company reportedly will shut down the system once it's able to move its BPL customers to other broadband providers.

"Currently, the company does not have plans for a large-scale commercial rollout of BPL in the company's service territories," the memorandum states. Progress Energy's decision comes on the heels of announced shutdowns of BPL field trials in Penn Yan, New York, and Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

PEC Vice President of Energy Delivery Solutions Lisa Myers said the utility obtained significant information about the design, construction and operation of a BPL system. "Overall, this has been a successful test for us," the memorandum quotes her as saying. "We have gathered valuable information about broadband over power lines and its potential."

qDuring its six-month Phase I and Phase II tests, the utility says it offered broadband service to more than 400 homes in southern Wake County. Earlier this year, FCC Chairman Michael Powell visited the BPL field trial to promote the technology, and local radio amateurs spoke briefly with him about their interference concerns.

The PEC memorandum acknowledged Amateur Radio interference complaints. "BPL has met with vocal opposition

from amateur or 'ham' radio operators who are concerned that the service will interfere with the radio frequencies they use," it said. "Some complaints were filed with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) during Phase II by ham radio operators using mobile equipment in search of BPL signals."

Responding to one amateur's complaint, the FCC earlier this summer took measurements in the field trial area. FCC Office of Engineering and Technology (OET) Deputy Chief Bruce A. Franca said the FCC concluded that PEC's BPL trial "is in compliance" with FCC rules and that the company's ham band notching efforts "are effective" to avoid the potential for harmful interference. The ARRL has requested clarification of certain claims made in Franca's July 22 letter, however. The memorandum cites PEC Director of Emerging Technologies Matt Oja as saying the technology PEC selected--by Amperion--"allowed us to address all complaints by changing the settings to mitigate interference."

One of the amateurs who's been closely monitoring PEC's foray into BPL--Gary Pearce, KN4AQ--says he's pleased with the utility's decision. "It's a positive thing for ham radio that Progress Energy is not going to be pursuing BPL for whatever reason they decided not to do it," Pearce told ARRL. "It's going to make a lot of hams in Eastern North Carolina happy."

Pearce acknowledged that Progress Energy and Amperion personnel worked closely with local amateurs to notch out interference on HF amateur frequencies. Effective notching turned out to be more difficult than anticipated, however. Even following the FCC's visit to take measurements, amateurs continued to report strong BPL interference on the high end of 20 meters as well as in the HF international broadcast bands.

A news report on Progress Energy's BPL decision appeared in the August 6 editions of the Raleigh News & Observer <<http://www.newsobserver.com/business/nc/story/1504502p-7666421c.html>>. There's more information about BPL and Amateur Radio on the ARRL Web site <<http://www.arrl.org/bpl>>.

WEATHER FORCES EARLY SHUTDOWN OF AVES ISLAND YV0D DXPEDITION

Disappointing news for DXers hoping to check another rare one off their lists. With bad weather headed its way, the YV0D Aves Island Dxpediton shut down a couple of days early. YV0D went silent August 4 at 1045 UTC. Aves Island is one of the top-10 most-wanted DXCC entities.

Team member Martti Laine, OH2BH, informed the 20-meter SSB pileup early on August 4 that YV0D would not be staying until August 6 as planned. "We are going QRT in the morning," he said. "The weather is very bad. A storm is coming."

Despite the shorter-than-expected operation, YV0D logged some 18,500 QSOs--including a number of 6-meter QSOs during an opening--in around 59 hours of operation, according to The Daily DX <<http://www.dailydx.com>>. Radio Club Venezolano Vice President Haroldo Rodriguez, YV5BD, told The Daily DX that the YV0D team had to brave 5-meter waves when departing Aves Island aboard a Venezuelan Navy vessel, expected back in Venezuela August 6.

The YV0D operators on the air August 1 and at one point had established seven operating positions--although not all were on the air at the same time. According to The Daily DX, the 12-member DXpediton team never did get antennas erected for 160 and 80 meters. Operations concentrated largely on 40, 30, 20, 15 and 12 meters on CW, SSB and RTTY. Antennas were installed for satellite work as well as for 6, 10, 15, 20, 30 and 40 meters, The Daily DX reported.

Forecasters worried that a tropical depression headed right in the direction of Aves Island might develop into a tropical storm. The island rises only a few meters above sea level. Squalls and locally heavy rain were associated with the storm.

The Aves Island YV0D DXpediton plans to upload its logs to ARRL's Logbook of the World <<http://www.arrl.org/lotw>>. The QSL manager of the Dxpediton is Dianna Killeen, KB6NAN, POB 911, Pescadero, CA 94060-0911. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope (US stations) or a self-addressed envelope and appropriate return postage (non-US stations) with QSLs. The Dxpediton also will accept cards via the bureau.

FCC SAYS NEW VANITY FEE REALLY GOES INTO EFFECT TUESDAY, AUGUST 10

Hold the phone! The FCC apparently can preempt The Federal Register when it comes to setting effective dates for orders. Commission personnel have clarified that the new Amateur Radio vanity call sign regulatory fee of \$20.80 for the 10-year license term actually will become effective Tuesday, August 10, not Friday, August 6 as ARRL and others had announced based on information in The Federal Register.

A staff member at the FCC's Gettysburg office told ARRL that the Commission's computer system has been programmed to accept the new fee starting August 10. A management-level staffer in the FCC's Office of Managing Director explained that the Commission was not necessarily bound by the August 6 effective date The Federal Register indicates, which is 30 days after publication of the order containing the new fee schedule.

Applicants for amateur vanity call signs will continue to pay the \$16.30 fee per vanity call sign application until the new fee goes into effect. All applications received at the FCC on or after Tuesday, August 10 must be accompanied by the new, higher fee.

OTHER AMATEUR NEWS

FCC no longer issuing certain 2x3-format vanity call signs: The FCC has ceased issuing 2x3-format Amateur Radio vanity call signs that begin with the prefixes WC, WR, WK and WT (eg, WR1AAA, WC4ZZZ). The Commission erroneously granted more than 150 WR and WC-prefix 2x3 vanity call signs from 1997 through September 2003, after which it began rejecting such call sign requests. In the late 1970s, the FCC announced a new Amateur Service call sign assignment system. It provided four standard call sign groups, designated Group A, B, C and D, delineated by license class and issued sequentially with no backfilling. The FCC's Bill Cross, W3TN, recently told the nation's volunteer examiner coordinators (VECs) that the FCC also had a "Group X." These included WC (RACES), WR (repeater), WK and WT-prefix 2x3-format call signs reportedly reserved for special-use licenses. The FCC stopped issuing repeater call signs in 1983 and ceased renewing RACES licenses in 2000. After the current vanity program began in 1996, several ham clubs sought new and formerly held repeater and RACES-type call signs. When the Universal Licensing System came along in August 1999, however, the FCC encountered some licensing system programming shortcomings, including the anomalous assignments of WC and WR-prefix 2x3 call signs as acceptable formats. When the FCC implemented programming corrections that halted the issuance of Group X call signs in September 2003, it did not advise the amateur community. As a result, several amateurs who filed for 2x3 WC or WR-prefix call signs had their applications dismissed with the explanation that the applicant's call sign choice was unavailable. That remains the case. The FCC has not indicated whether it plans to address the WC and WR-prefix 2x3 call signs it's already issued.

FCC expands Universal Licensing System Hotline Support: The FCC has announced expanded hours for its Universal Licensing System (ULS) <<http://wireless.fcc.gov/uls/>> Hotline Support. ULS users now may reach the FCC ULS Hotline by phone--toll-free, 877-480-3201 or local, 717-338-2888 (Amateur Service callers select Option 2)--from 8 AM until 7 PM Eastern Time except on federal holidays. ULS Hotline Support also is available via e-mail <ulshelp@fcc.gov>. Contact ULS Hotline Support if you have questions about which applications to use, what information is being requested on a ULS form or schedule or any other ULS-related licensing matter. The FCC continues to provide ULS technical support weekdays from 8 AM until 6 PM Eastern time. Call toll-free, 877-480-33701 or local, 202-414-1250 (TTY 202-414-1255). Technical Support handles questions concerning computer access to ULS, uploading files, submitting attachments to ULS filings and FRN passwords. The FCC notes that all calls to the ULS hotlines are recorded.--FCC

AMSAT-UK announces new amateur satellite project: AMSAT-UK has announced that an Amateur Radio transponder will be part of the European Space Agency's (ESA) Student Space Exploration and Technology Initiative (SSETI) "Express" satellite. Onboard will be a 2.4 GHz transmitter and a 437 MHz receiver. The pair will be turned into an amateur FM voice transponder after the transmitter serves initial telemetry duty. "These frequencies will enable the many amateurs who already have AMSAT OSCAR 40 equipment to use it in an exciting new way," AMSAT-UK Chairman Martin Sweeting, G3YJO, said. He told participants at the 2004 AMSAT-UK

Colloquium July 30-August 1 that AMSAT-UK has arranged with the ESA to provide--at very short notice--an S band transmitter for the SSETI Express. The 2.4 GHz transmitter will become the downlink of the single-channel FM U/S transponder. Holger Eckart, DF2FQ, will provide the UHF receiver. An AMSAT-UK team is developing the 2.4 GHz downlink exciter, switching-mode power supply and control interfaces. A 3 W 2.4 GHz power amplifier--identical to the one flying in the recently launched AO-51 "Echo" satellite--already has been completed. The S band antennas consist of three flat-plate patches. The SSETI Express is believed to be the first-ever Pan-European student satellite, with more than 100 students and their teachers at several European universities taking part. Spacecraft integration is due to start this month, and plans call for launching the satellite into a 680 km sun-synchronous orbit next April from Russia.

County hunters turn to 30 meters with sunspot decline: County hunting enthusiasts have begun using 30 meters (10.114 MHz) for their CW activities. "With the decline of sunspot activity and worsening propagation on 20 meters, county hunters have established the new frequency for working mobile stations around the US," says Bob Voss, N4CD. "All are welcome to join in and work the mobiles as they travel through the 3077 counties in the USA giving out contacts." The new 10.114 MHz frequency joins the 20 and 40-meter CW county hunting frequencies of 14.0565 MHz and 7.039 MHz. CQ sponsors the USA Counties Award (USA-CA) program. More information is on the County Hunters Web site <<http://www.countyhunter.com/>>.

DXCC DESK ACCREDITS DX OPERATIONS

The following DX operations have been approved for DXCC credit: YA7X, Afghanistan, March 1-April 30, 2004; HZ1AN, HZ1IZ, Saudi Arabia, all operations; 3DXQZ, Republic of Guinea, April 20-30, 2004; YI9MC, Iraq, current operation effective March 23, 2004; 5V7AD, Togo, June 12-22, 2004. For more information, visit the DXCC Web page <<http://www.arrl.org/awards/dxcc>>. A new feature, DXCC FAQ <<http://www.arrl.org/awards/dxcc/faq/>>, can answer most of your questions on DXCC program issues.

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