



Bella Vista Radio Club Celebrates 25 Years

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From Ron – K5XK: Few would have thought the Bella Vista area radio club would one day be recognized as one of the oldest--and largest--amateur radio clubs in the region. Initially organized as the Bella Vista Repeater Group in 1993, its initial focus was serving Benton County with a reliable, state of the art, wide area 2-Meter repeater.

Its history has very humble beginnings, largely with former members from the now-defunct Northwest Arkansas Amateur Radio Club, meeting in Springdale. Prior to the mid-90s, the NWA ARC operated several area repeaters, including 'the 147.030 machine,' located on the London Water Tower in Bella Vista. Our questions of BVRC's genesis led us to another interesting visit with long time member Bill Davidson, WØJLY.

Bill explained that maintenance and support for the .030 repeater from the NWA Club "always seemed to be lacking." As leadership changed, interest diminished in the club's sole Benton County

repeater. Bill found himself all alone in trying to keep the machine on the air.

Looking for a more reliable option, Bella Vista retiree John Hansen, AB5UN, formed the fledgling Bella Vista 'Repeater Group' with sixty supporters from Rogers, Bentonville and Bella Vista. \$3,000 was raised and a new repeater was soon launched on 147.255 MHz, located on an eastern POA water tower. The Repeater Group was off and running. Its first president, Bill Wright-KC5GN (SK), was a good administrator and soon secured non-profit status for the club.

The new 147.255 repeater offered many computerized features, including an 'Auto Patch' telephone link and remote command signal strength reporting. But maintenance was still required, shared by Hansen and Davidson. As the government asserted increased control of the country's water towers, access to the radio shack became increasingly limited.

Eventually AB5UN lost interest in the hobby, leaving Bill to shoulder total maintenance of the repeater, which was moved to the more centralized Trafalgar Water Tower. Bill, along with Glenn Allen - W5VCC (SK), worked to expand club membership, conducting licensing classes in Morse Code and electronics. These early classes yielded two dozen new hams.

One of the new club recruits was then Benton County deputy sheriff Ken Farmer - KD5UFY. Hugh - WAØTDQ, remembers that Ken would stop by WØJLY's after work, for CW practice. Ken eventually became Bella Vista Chief of Police and club Repeater Trustee. After Ken's retirement in 2016, Fred Lemley - K5QBX, was appointed Repeater Trustee. And when it became apparent the repeater needed to be relocated, Fred temporarily hosted the repeater at his Highland's QTH while an extensive search was made for a new permanent site. The solution was found in 2017, when the repeater was relocated to the K5SRS commercial tower just north of the AR/MO state line, across from the Jane Walmart.

WØJLY remembers Repeater Group meetings were informal and held at area restaurants. He recalls only one Field Day during the early years. Under the presidency of Bob Femrite – KØSNG, the club resumed Field Day participation, generating a large number of contacts and high scores from portable stations operating CW, SSB, and Digital modes. Under the 2018 guidance of K5QBX, the tradition of demonstrating emergency communications capability during ARRL Field Day was revitalized.

Under the leadership of Ken Mummery – K6RLA, the club voted in 2016 to change its name to Bella Vista ‘Radio Club,’ reflecting members’ expanded interest in all areas of the hobby. In 2017, the club was rewarded by efforts of members Bob McIntire – AC5LX, and Walt Gaspord – AF5XY (SK), as meetings were moved to new spacious facilities at Highland Christian Church. WØJLY was recognized as ‘Member Emeritus.’ The first ‘Ham of the Year’ was awarded to Steve Werner, K5SAW, for his many contributions of time and technical expertise to area hams.

Also in 2017, Glenn Kilpatrick, WB5L, organized a new Volunteer Exam team. Later that year, Glenn was elected president. Meetings were moved to evening hours, and “The Signal,” a new monthly newsletter edited by Don Banta, K5DB, was launched. These efforts resulted in significant growth in membership. Today, the club is a diverse group of more than 80 licensed and prospective radio amateurs with varied interests. Membership is spread across Benton, Carroll, Washington, Newton and McDonald counties, in Arkansas & Missouri.

Twenty-five years later, these early club members continue to be active: Bob McIntire – AC5LX, Bill Davidson, – WØJLY, and former presidents Hugh Maddox – WAØTDQ, Vern Sidler – AA6AR, Bob Femrite – KØSNG, and Ken Mummery – K6RLA. We salute these and so many other former members whose contributions we enjoy to this day.

As we look to the future, we enthusiastically embrace a new beginning in 2019, as we continue to collectively enjoy and explore “The World’s Best Hobby!”

(Photos of BVRC ‘Member Emeritus’, Bill Davidson – WØJLY. As of 9/12/18, 97 years old, ham for 78 years, and active daily: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/RcpzDmeq96DJfBwb9>

From Don – K5DB: BVRC reaches a milestone in 2019, as we celebrate our 25th year of existence. BVRC was incorporated on March 17, 1993, originally as the Bella Vista Repeater Group (BVRG). Technically, we’re already in our 25th year, but since the club was not founded at the beginning of the calendar year, we are going to observe this anniversary during the 12 months of 2019. The above anniversary logo will appear on the banner of THE SIGNAL for each issue of 2019 and will also appear on BVRC’s website, to ensure that anyone reading SIGNAL issues or viewing the website will be made aware of this great accomplishment.

Since its founding, BVRC has maintained a top-notch level of providing informative monthly programs, helps (elmering), and activities to aid in enabling new and veteran hams alike in increasing their enjoyment of our great hobby. We continue to do that today, which has resulted in BVRC being the largest and fastest-growing radio club in Northwest Arkansas. Several special events are in the works for this year, so stay tuned!

This type of growth just doesn’t “happen”. Yes, the club officers and appointed chairpersons do their part with programs and activities, but it is the “unsung heros” – YOU THE MEMBERS – who actually cause a phenomenon such as this to occur. THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH.

As we announce the various club events this coming year to celebrate this milestone in BVRC’s history, be sure and mark your calendar to get involved with some – or all – of them!