

September 30, 2020
ICARC NEWSLETTER



Officers for 2020:

President - Doug Fitzsimmons K3LAB
Vice President - Harry Dushac K3FSE
Treasurer - Terry Carnahan KB3JOD
Secretary - Chris Edwards N3VFK

Board Members for 2020:

1. Dave Dzelsky N3DZ
2. Craig Bigler AB3XA
3. Jerry Kiehl WB3DUD
4. Cass Fitzgerald, N3FLO
5. Larry Freeman N3LT

LOCAL HAPPENINGS:

Next meeting: October 6, 2020, 7:30 pm at Dave Steiner's home.

The minutes(courtesy of Chris Edwards,) for the August ICARC meeting, can be read at the end of this document.

FOR SALE: Icom 756ProIII with Icom speaker, Icom desk mic and LDG AT1000Pro antenna tuner. \$1,250. If interested, please email: k3lab@arrl.net.

For sale: Kenwood TS-480 SAT (100W with built-in auto-tuner, stock mic, mounting bracket, and power cord), excellent condition and G5RV antenna (new, never unpacked). Asking price for all is \$800.00. Contact Terry at ka3utd@arrl.net (For more detailed information see the email posted directly to the club members by Gary Miller (KC3NHE) on September 7, 2020)

Contributed Article by Gary Miller (KC3NHE)

THE PROCESS OF ONLINE UPGRADING BY GARY C MILLER – KC3NHE

Recently we were all affected by the COVID-19 crisis. This inconvenience has led to the way we do things in everyday life including how we test and proctor exams. This is the story of how I became an Amateur Extra without ever leaving the house.

In April 2019 I became a newly licensed operator at the General level. Many of you may recall the story of how I failed the Technician but walked out a licensed General, which was a first for our club. In the fall of 2019, I decided that I needed to upgrade to the Amateur Extra, or Extra class. Unfortunately, I was the only one signed up to test at the October session and thus it was cancelled. Although I was

bummed out, I wasn't defeated, and I continued to study. I again signed up, this time for the April 2020 session, and was ready to go. And then COVID-19 hit and changed life as we know it. Within a matter of days everything that we had ever experienced and practiced in our day to day lives was no more and with that went the April testing session. This time around I was feeling defeated as the date of July 1, which was the date the extra question pool would change, was just over 10 weeks away and it looked as though my efforts would be all for nil. Reports were coming in that we were in the new normal and that face to face social activities in Pennsylvania would most likely remain cancelled through the summer. I was devastated.

I had placed my plans on hold and stopped studying, there really was no reason to continue to at this point. This went on until the first week of May when I learned through social media that the VEC's of W5YI and Laurel were starting to experiment with online testing. Now as you may or may not know these two VEC's have utilized electronic submission of test scores, the Form 605, which is the application to the FCC for licensing, and the Certificate of Successful Completion of Examination or CSCE for some time, which has allowed newly licensed hams to get on the air sooner, sometimes in the same day. Immediately I began to research this and found they were indeed offering online exams but in a very limited and infantile state, usually one time slot per week and no more than 3-5 applicants at a time. I didn't let that stop me however, and I picked my study material up and started working again.

By the time I was ready to test, which was about two weeks later, testing had expanded to daily sessions with some VE Teams offering multiple sessions per day. At this point nearly everything across the country had been shut down and virtual meetings were quickly becoming commonplace. This is where the start of my online upgrade process began. The next part is how I did it.

Once I learned of the process of online testing, I not only had to study material but also had to learn how to test. The process actually wasn't that complicated. In reality only a few things were needed to take the exam. The first was a stable internet connection, and this is the most important. The next was a program called Zoom, a virtual meeting platform which I already had on both my phone and tablet. We started using it on Easter Sunday when we weren't able to be together as a family. A tablet or laptop with microphone and camera were also needed, along with a good signed copy of my current FCC license and my state ID. A PayPal account was also required, more on that in a bit. After I had everything set and tested my connections several times over, I found a signup roster through W5YI. The rules were simple, sign up and be ready to test when they send the email announcing openings. The VE team I aligned with was testing twice a day with 4 slots available at each session. They were however offering one additional slot at each session for those looking to upgrade to Extra from General to accommodate as many as possible before the July 1 cutoff of the current question pool. The only downfall of this was each day it was all first come first served, this actually wasn't an issue however as there were dropouts everyday for all sessions. I only waited two days to get an open slot.

Once I was able to commit to the exam session, I was sent instructions on how to proceed. The first was a link to the VE's PayPal email. I had to pay a fee of \$14 before I could test, this was done ahead of time to eliminate the delay of payment being received upon successful completion later. I was also sent a link to a Zoom waiting room and was given a time to log in. I logged in at my scheduled time which was 1 PM local time, I say this because my VE's were based out of Texas and an hour behind. I waited about 45 minutes as the applicant ahead of me decided to take both the Technician and General exams. Once they completed I was then pulled from the waiting queue and into the exam session. The VE's first started off by having me show them my workspace in its entirety, for this I used my phone. They then examined my FCC and driver's licenses to ensure I was in fact me and was qualified to take the Extra exam.

Once they were satisfied, we then disconnected from the phone and the VE's took remote control of my tablet. Using hamstudy.org, which is how I found the testing session and took online practice exams, they loaded an Extra exam onto my screen and then returned control to me, while maintaining visual contact of both my screen and me. I finished the exam in about 30 minutes and received my score

instantly, a 43/50, my best score yet! My tablet then shut down on me and restarted out of nowhere, I thought, "Oh man I'm screwed!" I immediately connected with the VE's on my phone and they assured me that they captured the score and I was successful in passing the exam. They then gave me some instructions on the follow up, which included the signing of the CSCE and the Form 605 and told me to watch my email. I received both at the same time and signed them electronically and sent them back. This was about 3 PM local time, which was just shy of an hour after completion. The VE's told me it would take about an hour to receive them. After I sent them back I began checking the FCC database for updates as I knew this one was going in electronically. At 4:30 PM it was in there, I was an Amateur Extra operator! I went from General to Extra in just over two hours and was official, it was so short I never even got the chance to identify as a /AE on the air.

I hope you found this experience to be entertaining, helpful, and inspiring. If you know of anyone who is looking to get licensed or upgrade or are considering it yourself, try this route. It was painless and rather easy. Thanks for taking the time to read about my experience, 73 de KC3NHE!

OTHER INFORMATION

If anyone would like to include information or write an article for the Newsletter please let Larry Freeman know by email at:

wd4hoz@gmail.com. The only caveats are: The editor reserves the right to alter the format for publication purposes. The content may also be modified contingent upon accuracy and appropriateness of the contained material. The latter would, of course, be subject to the approval of the original author.

Indiana County Amateur Radio Club

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting 08/04/2020 Held at the QTH of Dave Steiner

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 7:30pm by Club President Doug Fitzsimmons. K3LAB with roll call & the Pledge of Allegiance.

Reports: The financial report was read by Club Treasurer Terry Carnahan KB3JOD. It was accepted & approved. The minutes of the June & July meetings were read by Club Secretary Chris Edwards N3VFK. They were accepted & approved.

Old Business: Doug asked if anyone was interested in helping out with the the Ghost Town Trail Challenge, which is scheduled for August 22, 2020. Respond to the email if interested.

New Business: Gary Miller KC3NHE Indiana County EC Coordinator held a drill on August 1 on two meters using simplex & the W3BMD repeater. There were six simplex check-in's & seven on the repeater. It lasted about 45 minutes. He also said an assessment survey will be sent out soon by email to see what modes operators have available to them if needed. Doug asked for comments about remote amateur licensing testing. Bill McMillen N3QM said as a VE he is willing to do online testing if it's workable or even in person if needed. The club decided to let it ride for now. For the September meeting location, Dave Steiner W3CDH said it was okay to use his QTH again. Doug thanked Dave for the continued use of his QTH. The motion was accepted & approved. Doug talked about a virtual Ham Expo being held on August 8th & 9th. He sent an email out to everyone & said that it was easy to sign up. Jerry Kiehl W3DUD said that he had two gasoline generators for sale & Dave Dzelsky N3DZ said he had a DMR open spot 3 for use if anyone was interested.

End of Business/Adjournment:The meeting was adjourned at 8:20pm

Attendance: 12

Doug Fitzsimmons K3LAB (Pres.)

Harry Dushac K3FSE (VP.)

Chris Edwards N3VFK (Sec.)

Terry Carnahan KB3JOD (Tres.)

Paul Morris K3VAR

Bill McMillen N3QM

Cassius Fitzgerald N3FLO

Dave Steiner W3CDH

Jerry Kiehl WB3DUD

Dave Dzelsky N3DZ

Gary Miller KC3NHE

Michael Schmaus KC3PWV