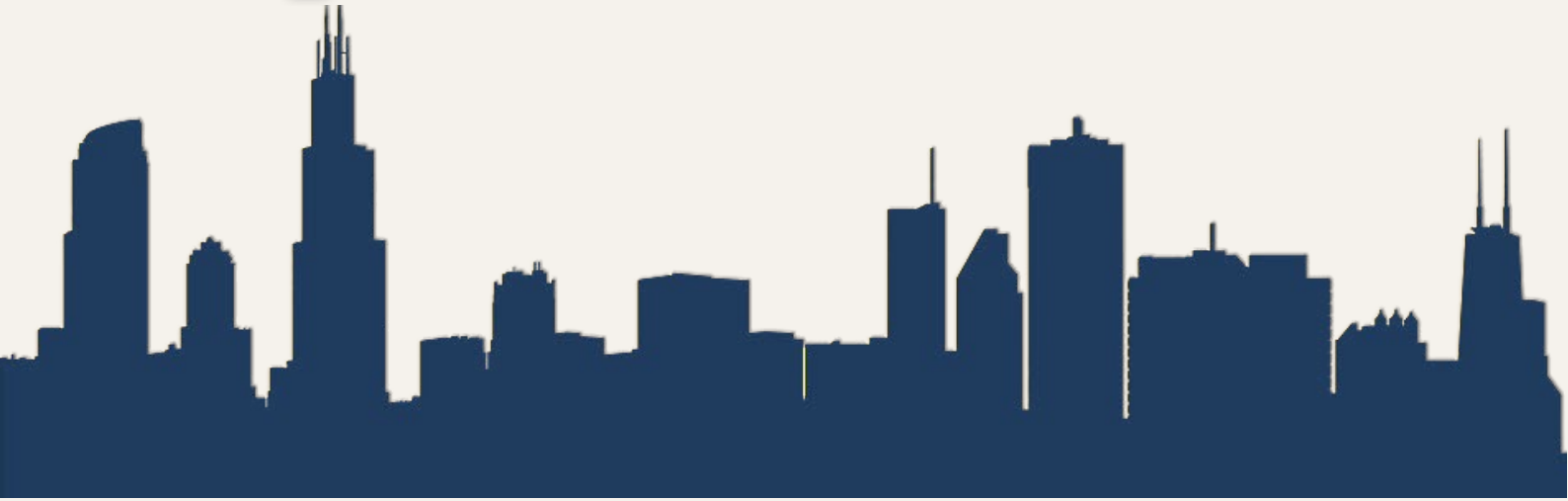


# *Squelch Tale*



*CHICAGO FM CLUB • EST 1965*

**VOLUME 61 | ISSUE 5**

**MAY 2026**



## Summer is Almost Here

It is hard to believe we are already heading into the end of May. This is always a busy and exciting time of year for the club. The weather is getting better, antennas are going back up, projects are moving outside, and many of us are starting to think about portable operating, Field Day, and the events we have coming up over the next few months.

Summer Field Day is now right around the corner. This year, the Chicago FM Club will be back at Camp Reinberg in Palatine for the weekend of June 26–28. Setup and check-in will begin on Friday, with the main weekend activities continuing through Sunday. Field Day is always one of the highlights of the year for our club. It gives us a chance to operate together, try different equipment, make contacts, enjoy the club picnic, and spend time with friends from the radio community. I hope you will make plans to join us.

I also want to thank everyone who continues to help keep the club active. Our nets, Friday Night Socials, testing sessions, education presentations, repeaters, website, newsletter, and special events all happen because members step up and give their time. That work does not go unnoticed. It is what keeps the Chicago FM Club moving forward and makes this club such a great place for new and longtime hams alike.

It is also not too early to mark your calendar for Radio Expo 2026, which will take place on Sunday, September 27 at the Boone County Fairgrounds in Belvidere. Radio Expo is one of the biggest events we host each year, and planning is already underway. As always, we will need volunteers to help make the event a success, so please keep an eye out for more information as we get closer.

### CFMC MEETING

Our May meeting will be held Wednesday, May 27 at 7:30 PM at the 16th District Police Station. The May meeting will also include an important vote regarding proposed revisions to the Chicago FM Club Constitution and By-Laws.

So until we meet again, thank you for your continued support of the Chicago FM Club. I hope to see you at the May meeting, at a Friday Night Social, or at one of the many club events coming up this summer.-----

73,

**Paul Gris** | *N9JZY, Chicago FM Club President*

## Upcoming CFMC Events

\*\*Please check on the air for the most up-to-date info\*\*

**Fri - 5/22 | 7:00pm**

**Friday Night Social**

**Russell's Barbecue**

1621 N Thatcher Ave  
Elmwood Park, IL 60707

**Wed - 5/27 | 7:30pm**

**CFMC Monthly Meeting  
16th District Police Station**

5151 N Milwaukee Ave  
Chicago, IL 60630

**Fri - 5/29 | 7:00pm**

**Friday Night Social**

**Ricobene's**

252 W 26th St.  
Chicago, IL 60616

**Fri - 6/05 | 7:00pm**

**Friday Night Social**

**Gulliver's Pizza & Pub**

17W517 Roosevelt Rd  
Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181

**Fri - 6/12 | 7:00pm**

**Friday Night Social**

**Portillo's**

7308 W. Lawrence Ave.  
Harwood Heights, IL 60706

**Sat - 6/13 | 10:00am**

**Ham and Eggs**

**Lumes Pancake House**

11601 S. Western Ave.  
Chicago, IL 60643

**Fri - 6/19 | 7:00pm**

**Friday Night Social**

**D'Agostino's Pizza and Pub**

3131 N Thatcher Ave  
River Grove, IL 60171

**Wed - 6/24 | 7:30pm**

**CFMC Monthly Meeting  
16th District Police Station**

5151 N Milwaukee Ave  
Chicago, IL 60630

# CFMC Repeaters

## 70 cm Repeater

**443.750 (+5MHz) PL 114.8**

*EchoLink: 62478 or WA9ORC-R*

*AllStar: Node 555492*

Regarded as the crown jewel of the Chicago area ham community, CFMC's 443.750 MHz repeater offers exceptional coverage spanning from Northwest Indiana to Southern Wisconsin — even reaching parts of Michigan. Connected to AllStar (Node 555492) and EchoLink (Node 62478 / WA9ORC-R), this system consistently delivers impressive long-range performance. It's also home to the long-running Night Watch Net, held nightly at 10:00pm, welcoming operators from near and far for friendly check-ins and conversation.

## 2-Meter Repeater

**146.760 (-0.6MHz) PL 107.2**

*EchoLink: 448319 or KD9YDD-R*

*AllStar: Node 555491*

The club's flagship 2-meter repeater operates on 146.760 MHz with a PL tone of 107.2 and is available on both AllStar (Node 555491) and EchoLink (Node 448319 / KD9YDD-R). This robust Motorola Quantar system, known for its clarity and dependability, supports nets, public service events, and daily traffic, serving as a reliable meeting point for hams across the region. The 146.760 output frequency also serves as the CFMC emergency frequency should repeaters go offline.

## WIRES-X (System Fusion)

**145.350 (-1.6MHz) DCS 072**

Located in Park Ridge with an antenna elevation of 180 feet, the CFMC System Fusion repeater on 145.350 MHz supports both C4FM digital and analog operation (DCS 072 on the analog side). Integrated with the WIRES-X network, it allows operators to connect to hundreds of rooms and repeaters worldwide at the push of a button. Whether operating locally or checking into nets across the globe, this repeater offers flexibility and reach while remaining accessible to analog users.

## 220 MHz North

**224.100 (-1.6MHz) PL 110.9**

*AllStar: Node 555490*

CFMC proudly supports the often-overlooked 1.25-meter band with two well-placed repeaters. The northern site, located in the suburbs and operating on 224.100 MHz, runs a 15-watt DX Radio repeater and is connected to AllStar Node 555490. Though modest in power, its performance and reach are impressive, offering solid coverage across northern Chicagoland. This repeater provides a quiet, low-traffic space for ragchews and exploring a less crowded portion of the amateur spectrum.

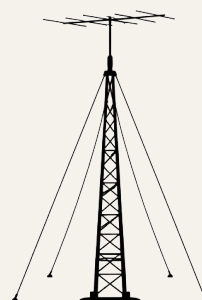
## 220 MHz South

**224.180 (-1.6MHz) PL 110.9**

Strategically located in Worth, IL, the southern 220 repeater mirrors the performance of its northern counterpart. Operating on 224.180 MHz, it uses a DX Radio 15-watt single-site repeater. This system extends CFMC's reach into the southern suburbs and offers hams another opportunity to explore the 220 MHz band — an excellent option for clear, local communications with minimal QRM.

All Licensed Amateur Radio Operators are welcome to use the CFMC Repeaters for normal station-to-station calls. If you enjoy using them and like the people you hear, consider joining our Club.

The Chicago FM Club is a not-for-profit amateur radio club operating the WA9ORC repeater systems. Membership is open to all licensed amateurs and is encouraged for those who use the repeaters often.



## The Night Watch

**443.750 - Every Night at 10:00pm**

CFMC's most attended net offers a great mix of camaraderie, conversation, and community. Come for the knowledge, stay for the fun each and every night of the week!-----

## Monday "Drive at Five"

**443.750 - Monday at 5:00pm**

Do you have a case of the Mondays? Kick off your week with the Drive at Five! This relaxed, mobile-friendly net is perfect for your commute or your shack.-----

## Tuesday 2-Meter Info Net

**146.760 - Tuesdays at 9:00pm**

The 2-Meter Info Net is a casual, ragchew-style net where members and guests can hear the latest updates about club events, activities, and announcements.-----

## Wednesday 220 Round Table

**224.100 - Wed at 7:30pm** *(Except Meeting Nights)*

Grab your 220 radio and join the 220 rebels on a social net focused on keeping the 220 band alive. Don't have a 220 radio? Don't worry, you can still join with Allstar on Node 555490.-----

## Thursday 2-Meter Tech Net

**146.760 - Thursdays at 8:00pm**

Got a question about radios, antennas, software, or anything ham-related? The Thursday 2-Meter Tech Net is your place to learn and share. Bring your questions and join the discussion. No question is too small, and everyone is welcome!-----

## Sunday

**Night Watch - 10pm**

*Kevin E Suddoth* | KD9ZDR

## Monday

**"Drive at Five" - 5pm**

*Kevin E Suddoth* | KD9ZDR

**Night Watch - 10pm**

*Paul Gris* | N9JZY

## Tuesday

**2-Meter Info Net - 9pm**

*Tom Stobble* | KB9AJM

**Night Watch - 10pm**

*John Cerza* | N9SRV

## Wednesday

**220 Round Table - 8:00pm**

*Jim Fanning* | KD9WNR

**Night Watch - 10pm**

*Bill Deans* | KD9TWA

## Thursday

**2-Meter Tech Net - 8:30pm**

*Charlie Sonnenberg* | KE9ESC

**Night Watch - 10pm**

*Naeem Ahmed* | N9DDD

## Friday

**Night Watch - 10pm**

*Marc Holland* | AA9HM

## Saturday

**Night Watch - 10pm**

*Joshua Hamlett* | KD9MXV

Night Watch April Check-In Stats

	Call	Name	Check-Ins
1	KC9KXG	Jim	28
2	WX9LAR	Larry	27
3	N9SRV	John	25
3	W9BAZ	Mikey	25
5	KD9ZDR	Kevin	21
6	KE9ESC	Charlie	19

Night Watch Monthly Check-In Stats

Month	Call Signs	Check-Ins
Nov	79	466
Dec	102	560
Jan	91	489
Feb	75	457
March	84	528
April	84	518

# RADIO of the MONTH

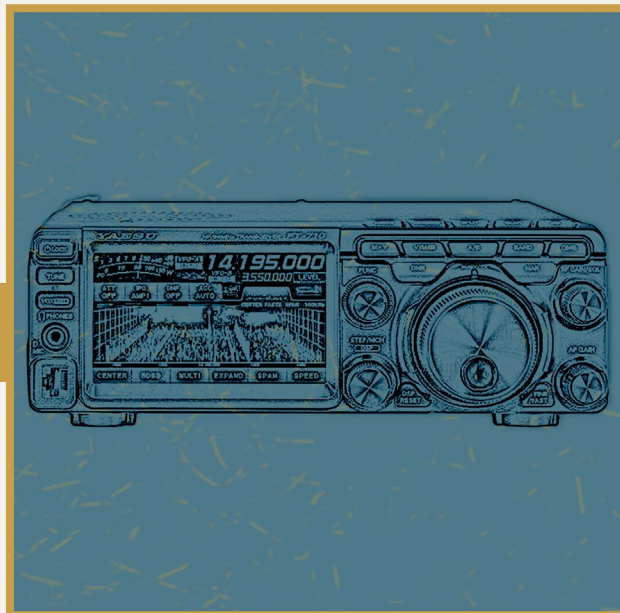
## Yaesu FT-710

This month's Radio of the Month is the Yaesu FT-710, a compact HF and 6-meter transceiver that brings many of Yaesu's modern SDR features into a smaller and more approachable package. As more operators explore HF from home stations, smaller operating desks, and computer-assisted setups, the FT-710 stands out as a radio that offers strong everyday performance without requiring a large footprint in the shack.

At its core, the FT-710 is a full-featured 100-watt HF/50 MHz transceiver covering 160 through 6 meters. It supports the traditional modes operators expect, including SSB, CW, AM, and FM, while also offering the kind of modern display and receiver tools that have become increasingly common in today's HF radios. Its color touchscreen, spectrum scope, and waterfall display give operators a visual way to monitor band activity, find signals, and better understand what is happening across a portion of the band.

One of the FT-710's biggest strengths is its SDR receiver design. By using modern digital signal processing, the radio gives operators useful tools for dealing with noise, interference, and crowded band conditions. Whether tuning across a busy band, chasing a weak signal, or simply trying to make the most of less-than-perfect conditions, those receiver features can make the radio feel larger than its physical size suggests.

The FT-710 also fits well in the modern digital shack. While modes like FT8 still require software such as WSJT-X on a computer, the radio provides a capable HF platform for operators who want to explore digital modes while still having a strong radio for voice and



CW. That flexibility is part of the appeal. It is not a single-purpose radio, but a compact HF station that can support many different interests.

Yaesu's AESS version of the FT-710 also includes the Acoustic Enhanced Speaker System, which pairs the radio with an external speaker to improve receive audio from a compact station. Combined with its manageable size, modern display, SDR architecture, and 100-watt output, the FT-710 is a strong choice for an operator looking for a current-generation HF radio that can grow with their interests.

Amateur radio continues to blend traditional operating with modern technology, and the FT-710 reflects that balance well. It is a capable HF communication tool, a solid platform for exploring the bands, and a good example of how today's compact radios can offer far more than their size might suggest.-----

Jeff Wuerth | *KD9RVJ, Squelch Tale Editor*

### FT-710

- **Transmit:** HF / 6M
- **Receive:** 30kHz-75MHz
- **Modes:** SSB, CW, AM, FM, digital
- **Output Power:** 100W
- **Antenna Tuner:** Built-in

# Meeting Minutes

Chicago FM Club (CFMC) Meeting Minutes				
Date		Wednesday, April 22, 2026		
Location		16 <sup>th</sup> District, Chicago Police Department		
Meeting Called to Order		19:44		
Officers Present			Board Members Present	
President	Paul, N9JZY	Present	Doug, KD9YFR	Present
Vice President	John, N9SRY	Present	Paul, N9ISP	Present
Secretary	Jim, KD9WNR	Present	Kevin, KD9ZDR	Present
Treasurer	Barry, K9FMB	Present	Alan, KC9IMF	Present
			Charlie, W9CEF	Present
			Joshua, KD9MXV (Trustee)	Present
<b>Member Introductions</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recitation of Pledge of Allegiance</li> <li>• Roll Call of All Present               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Total of 35 Members were present                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 3 Licensed Guests</li> <li>▪ 7 Unlicensed Guests</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>				
<b>Announcements</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paul, N9JZY announced               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Commented on the Large Turn-Out tonight</li> <li>○ Introduced Guests from Radio Arts Club SAIC (School of the Art Institute of Chicago)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Jim, KD9WNR announced               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Two New Members                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ KD9LQR, Eddie</li> <li>▪ KC9WCJ, Tim</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ 138 Total Members</li> <li>○ 60 on Discord</li> </ul> </li> </ul>				
<b>Reading and Approval of Minutes</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members were polled to confirm receipt of the Minutes from the previous meeting as published in the Squelch Tale. A motion was made to accept the Minutes by Tim, WD9DZV and seconded by Kevin, KD9WNR; The Minutes were accepted by voice vote.</li> </ul>				
<b>Treasurers Report</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barry, K9FMB presented the Treasurers Report; The Treasurers Report is available for review by any Voting Member.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A motion was made to accept the Treasurers Report by Joe, K9CTA and seconded by Doug, KD9YFR; The Treasurers Report was accepted by voice vote.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>				

## Committee Reports

- VE Team:
  - Bill, KD9TWA
    - 2 Upgrades
      - Charlie, KE9ESC upgraded to Extra
      - Pavlo, KE9FDR upgraded to General
    - 4 Exams Currently scheduled for next month  
<https://chicagofmclub.org/club-resources/fcc-testing/>
- Radio Expo:
  - John, N9SRY
    - Sunday, September 27<sup>th</sup>  
<https://chicagofmclub.org/radio-expo-2026/>
      - Charlie, W9CEF is Vice Chair
      - Flyer Published on Website and Facebook
      - Still researching for Tables and Chairs vendor
      - Food Vendors not chosen yet
- Tech Committee:
  - John, N9SRY
    - Still on Secondary 2m Repeater
      - Replacement Motorola Repeater being refurbished
    - Antenna Mount needs re-engineering
  - Paul, N9JZY
    - Alerted members to “Buttons the Clown”
      - Someone is randomly transmitting DTMF Codes over legitimate transmissions on our 440 Repeater
        - If heard, switch to the input and note signal strength
        - Report Location Heard and Signal Strength to [wa9orc@gmail.com](mailto:wa9orc@gmail.com)
- Website:
  - Jim, KD9WNR
    - No significant changes; Updates only
    - Radio Expo Flyer published on Website and Facebook  
<https://chicagofmclub.org/>
- Net Coordinator
  - Kevin, KD9ZDR
    - Need Net Controllers
    - TechNet on Thursday is Open  
<https://chicagofmclub.org/club-resources/cfmc-nets/>
- Squelch Tale:
  - Jeff, KD9RVJ
    - Updates coming sooner next month  
<https://chicagofmclub.org/club-news/squelch-tale-archive/>
- Field Day:
  - Paul, N9JZY & Bill, KD9TWA
    - Club Picnic on Saturday
    - Paul, N9ISP and Alan, KC9IMF are once again donating Beef for the Burgers
    - Doug, KD9YFR will bring a Boat Anchor  
<https://chicagofmclub.org/field-day-2026/>
- Education
  - Charlie, W9CEF
    - Ham Shack Design presented by Mac, KK7UMB from the Radio Arts Club of SAIC (School of the Art Institute of Chicago)  
<https://chicagofmclub.org/club-resources/education/>

## Unfinished Business

- A guest had questions about installing a 50 ft Rohn Tower on his Chicago property for meteorological purposes. He was getting push-back from local authorities.
  - Advised getting a Ham License and dual-purpose the tower
  - Legal protections and less push-back for Ham radio antenna installations

## New Business

- Resolution: Revision to the CFMC Constitution and By-Laws
  - Whereas, the Constitution and By-Laws of the Chicago FM Club (CFMC) have not been revised since February 9th, 2019; and,
  - Whereas, the advent of social media and on-line applications have been adopted into CFMC operations; and,
  - Whereas, membership policies have changed over the years and have not been documented in the current Constitution and By-Laws.
- Therefore, be it Resolved, that the CFMC Constitution and By-Laws shall be revised to reflect current policies and procedures as outlined below:
  - Constitution
    - Article III – Membership
      - Revised Categories of Membership
    - Article IV – Board of Directors
      - Format changes only
    - Article V – Duties of Officers and Board of Directors
      - Removed reference to Scrap Book maintained by Secretary
    - Article VI – Meetings – Board of Directors
      - Removed periodic meeting requirements; Allow for teleconference
    - Article VIII – General Meetings
      - Changed “mail” to “email” and removed “mail-in ballots”
    - Article IX – Order of Business
      - Revised order of business
    - Article XII – Elections
      - Revised to allow for electronic voting
  - By-Laws
    - Article III – Resignation and Expulsion
      - Revised guidelines for handling complaints
    - Article V – In General
      - Removed Section 2, Secretary petty cash

- If Adopted, this resolution shall take effect immediately and be communicated to all CFMC Members via official channels.

- <https://chicagofmclub.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Chicago-FM-Club-Constitution-Revised.pdf>

*Note: A link will be sent to via email to all CFMC Members to the Revised Constitution following the April Meeting. A vote to adopt this resolution and accept the revisions will be called at the May General Meeting.*

## Adjourn

- A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Joshua KD9MXV and seconded by Charlie W9CEF. The motion was passed by voice vote.
- The meeting was Adjourned at 20:43

## 50/50

- Tim, WD9DZV ran the 50/50; Won by Ken, KB9QBR

## Post Meeting Presentation

- Ham Shack Design was presented by Mac, KK7UMB from the Radio Arts Club of SAIC (School of the Art Institute of Chicago)

## New and Upgraded Licenses

On Saturday, May 9, we had nine license applicants, with seven successful completions. Of the seven, there were six new Technicians and one upgrade to General.

Three of the applicants were our friends from the School of the Art Institute's Radio Arts Club.

Congratulations to new Technicians Kate I., Ken K., Hannah K., Angelo M., Amilia W., and Sophie W., and to new General Jim L. Welcome to the world of Amateur Radio.

I would also like to thank our VE team: Seth AD9GZ, Bob KB9EFG, Dave KD9JFH, Doug KD9YFR, and Bill N9WRP. Great work, guys! The club can't do this without you.

The session was held at the 16th District Police Station. Our next test session will be Saturday, June 13, 2026!-----

**Bill Deans** | *KD9TWA, VE Testing*

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## A Surprise "73" from Kazakhstan

Dennis Bricault, KD9YUO, recently shared one of those unexpected amateur radio moments that reminds us just how far-reaching this hobby can be.

Dennis is currently teaching abroad on a fellowship, and before the start of class one afternoon, a student came up to speak with him. She mentioned that she had heard from someone that he had an interest in radio. Then, much to his surprise, she passed along a message:

*"73 from UL9KEO."*

Even better, she gave the call sign using the NATO phonetic alphabet.

Dennis was caught completely off guard. It is not every day that someone walks up before class and passes along "73," let alone from a call sign connected to Kazakhstan. Naturally, he asked her for the story behind it, including where the UL prefix came from.

She explained that UL9KEO was the call sign

used by her father in Kazakhstan back in the 1990s. He had been active in amateur radio for several years during that time. Eventually, though, he had the opportunity to trade his radio gear for a computer. In the early post-Soviet years, that was a very different kind of opportunity than it might sound like today. At the time, a computer could be an incredibly valuable tool, and for him, it was apparently a deal worth making.

The two chatted a bit more, and she asked Dennis for his call sign as well. What started as a quick conversation before class turned into a small reminder of the way amateur radio connects people across countries, generations, and unexpected moments.

Dennis will be returning to the United States in June, but the conversation made for a fun surprise while teaching abroad. It was also a nice reminder that the phrase "73" can travel a long way — sometimes across continents, sometimes across generations, and sometimes right back to you in the classroom before the start of class.-----



# CFMC EDUCATION



Hi everyone,

I'm Charlie, W9CEF, and I stepped into the role of Education Lead this past March. I was first introduced to amateur radio as a kid through my uncle's impressive setup, though at the time, I did not fully appreciate it. About six years ago, I decided to dive into the hobby myself. After discovering scanner-focused Twitter accounts, I wanted to learn how it all worked firsthand. Naturally, I picked up a "high-quality" Baofeng and started listening.

That curiosity led me to repeaters, and eventually to the Chicago FM Club's repeater. After a while, just listening was not enough, so I got licensed and got on the air.

What I love most about amateur radio is the "choose your own adventure" aspect of the hobby. I enjoy POTA activations, experimenting with antennas, and collecting QSL cards. Lately, I have also become interested in contesting and plan to explore that more this year.

My main goal as Education Lead is to help members get on the air and actively use their privileges. We will continue having presentations at our monthly meetings, but I would also like to expand our learning opportunities to include POTA outings, special events, and other hands-on activities.

Presentations will always be radio-related, but the range of possible topics is huge. If you have ideas, questions, or subjects you would like to see covered, please reach out to me by email at [charlie@askchucky.com](mailto:charlie@askchucky.com) or through the club's Discord server.

## Upcoming Education Schedule:

**May 27th** - Skywarn - **Brian** | *KC9MSG*

**June 24th** - Microwave Communications - **Charlie** | *KE9ESC*

**July 22nd** - Beginning Soldering Techniques - **Jim** | *KD9WNR*

**August 26th** - Advancing Search and Rescue Operations - **Pavlo** - *KE9FDR*

**September 23rd** - TBD - **Chloe** | *W2CXE*

**October 28th** - Network Security - **Joshua** | *KD9MXV*

Looking forward to seeing you on the air!

73,

**Charlie Ferreira** | *W9CEF, Education Coordinator*



## May Meeting

The next Chicago FM Club meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 27th at 7:30 PM at the Chicago Police 16th District Station.

This month's meeting will feature a timely presentation on Skywarn by Brian, KC9MSG, covering weather spotting, public service, and the role amateur radio can play during severe weather events.

Members should also note that Summer Field Day is quickly approaching and will be held June 27-28, 2026. More details will be shared as plans come together.

As always, members and guests are encouraged to attend, catch up with the club, and take part in the evening's discussion.-----

## CFMC Summer Field Day 2026

The Chicago FM Club's Summer Field Day 2026 is coming up fast! This year's event will be held the weekend of **June 26-28** at Camp Reinberg, 1801 N. Quentin Road in Palatine.

Saturday will also include the annual CFMC Club Picnic. The club will provide the main courses, soft drinks, coffee, and water for the weekend. Members are encouraged to bring a snack, side, or dessert to share, and to bring a folding chair.

Mark your calendar now and plan to join us for one of the club's biggest operating weekends of the year!-----

## Constitution and By-Laws Revision Vote

At the April General Meeting, a resolution was put forward to revise the Chicago FM Club Constitution and By-Laws. The proposed updates are intended to reflect current club policies, membership practices, and the use of social media and online applications in club operations.

In accordance with Article III, Amendments to the Constitution, members must receive written notice before voting on proposed amendments. Adoption requires the affirmative vote of two-thirds of the full members entitled to vote who are personally present and voting at the meeting.

The proposed revisions will be voted on at the May General Meeting on Wednesday, May 27th. Members are encouraged to review the full resolution and proposed revised constitution on the CFMC website before attending.-----

## CFMC on the Web



Check out our website

<https://www.chicagofmclub.org/>



Chat with us on Discord



Connect with us on Groups.io

<https://groups.io/g/CFMC/>



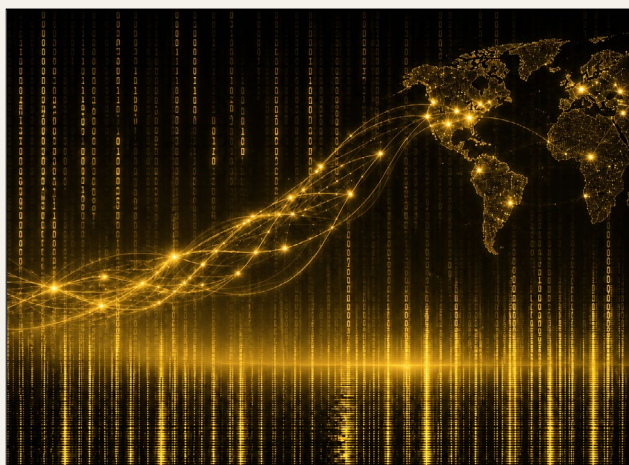
Join us on Facebook



Follow us on X

[https://x.com/CFMC\\_WA9ORC](https://x.com/CFMC_WA9ORC)

# Tech Talk



## FT8: The Gateway to HF Digital Modes

For many hams, “digital modes” can sound a little intimidating. It may bring to mind computer settings, audio levels, software menus, and mysterious signals scrolling across a waterfall. But one mode has made HF digital operating more approachable than ever: FT8.

FT8 has become one of the most popular digital modes on the HF bands because it is efficient, widely used, and surprisingly capable. It allows operators to make contacts even when signals are too weak to hear clearly by ear. For anyone curious about HF digital modes, FT8 is often the best place to begin.

### What Is FT8?

FT8 is a weak-signal digital mode used to make quick, structured contacts. It is part of the WSJT-X software family, which was developed for weak-signal amateur radio communication.

Unlike voice, CW, or traditional keyboard-to-keyboard modes, FT8 is not designed for conversation. A typical FT8 contact is short and standardized. Stations exchange call signs, grid squares, signal reports,

confirmations, and 73. That is about it.

At first, that may sound a little impersonal. But the simplicity is the point. Because the messages are short and predictable, FT8 can decode signals that are far below what we would normally copy by ear. A station that sounds like nothing more than noise may still appear clearly on the screen.

### Why Has FT8 Become So Popular?

FT8 works well when conditions are poor, antennas are modest, or power is limited. That makes it appealing to a wide range of operators. Someone with a small backyard antenna, a portable station, or a low-power setup can still make meaningful HF contacts.

It is also a great way to see what the bands are doing. You may think a band is dead because you do not hear much voice activity, only to open FT8 and find signals from across the country or across the world. In that way, FT8 becomes both an operating mode and a propagation tool.

Another reason for its popularity is that many modern radios make the setup easier than it used to be. With radios such as the Icom IC-7300, Yaesu FT-710, Yaesu FT-991A, Icom IC-705, and similar models, a single USB cable can often handle both computer audio and radio control. Older radios can still work very well, but they may need an external sound interface or additional cabling.

### What Does an FT8 Contact Look Like?

FT8 contacts happen in short timed transmissions. One station transmits, then the other replies in the next time slot. The software handles the decoding and presents stations on the screen. The operator chooses who to call, watches the exchange, and logs

the contact when it is complete.

A basic FT8 contact usually includes:

- A CQ or call to another station
- Exchange of signal reports
- Confirmation that the reports were received
- A final 73

That is the whole contact. It is not meant to replace a friendly voice QSO or a long ragchew. FT8 is more like a precise, efficient exchange of essential information.

## What Do You Need to Try FT8?

A basic FT8 station includes an HF radio, a computer, FT8 software such as WSJT-X, a way to pass audio between the radio and computer, and an antenna. The computer clock also needs to be accurate because FT8 depends on stations transmitting and receiving in carefully timed windows.

For many operators, time synchronization is one of the first “new” concepts they encounter with FT8. If the computer clock is off by even a little, decoding can become unreliable. Fortunately, once time sync is set up, it usually runs quietly in the background.

The other important setup detail is audio level. A clean FT8 signal is much better than a loud, overdriven one. Operators should keep transmit audio reasonable, avoid excessive ALC, and make sure they are not creating distortion or splatter on the waterfall.

## What FT8 Is — and Is Not

FT8 is excellent for making quick contacts under challenging conditions. It is useful for working DX, testing antennas, checking propagation, and getting on the air when voice activity is limited.

But FT8 is not a conversation mode. You will not use it to talk about your radio, your

antenna, the weather, or what you had for dinner. The mode is intentionally structured and brief.

That does not make FT8 less valuable. It simply means it has a specific purpose. It is a tool for efficient weak-signal contacts. For hams who want more conversational digital communication, modes like JS8Call, PSK31, Olivia, RTTY, and others offer different experiences.

## Why FT8 Is a Great First Digital Mode

FT8 is a great gateway into HF digital operating because it teaches the basic station skills that carry over to other modes. Once you learn how to connect your radio to a computer, configure audio, control transmit and receive, manage timing, and watch a waterfall, many other digital modes become much less mysterious.

It also gives quick feedback. Within a few minutes of listening, you can often see stations being decoded. You can learn which bands are open, where your signal is being heard, and how your station performs under different conditions. That immediate feedback makes FT8 both useful and fun.

## Final Thoughts

FT8 has changed HF operating for many hams. It has opened the door for stations with modest antennas, limited power, and less-than-perfect conditions. It has also introduced many operators to the broader world of digital amateur radio.

It may not have the personality of a long voice QSO or the rhythm of CW, but FT8 has its own appeal. It is efficient, active, and surprisingly powerful. For anyone interested in HF digital modes, FT8 is a natural place to start.-----

**Jeff Wuerth** | *KD9RVJ, Squelch Tale Editor*

# Chicago

# FM Club

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