

Squelch Tale



CHICAGO FM CLUB • EST 1965

VOLUME 61 | ISSUE 7

JULY 2026



President's Message

Turning Up the Heat

Summer has certainly made its presence known around Chicago. Between the heat, humidity, and smoke drifting into the area, there have been plenty of days when staying inside near the air conditioning—and the radio—has seemed like the best option. As always, please take care of yourself when working outdoors, stay hydrated, and keep an eye on current conditions.

This summer also gives us a special reason to celebrate. America is marking its 250th anniversary, and amateur radio provides a fitting way to recognize the occasion. For generations, radio amateurs have helped connect communities, supported public service and emergency communications, experimented with new technology, and built friendships across state lines and around the world.

Hams throughout the country are commemorating America's 250th through special-event stations and the ARRL America250 Worked All States operating event. I encourage our members to listen for these stations, make a few contacts, and add amateur radio to the many ways we celebrate this historic milestone.

A Successful Summer Field Day

I am pleased to report that CFMC Summer Field Day was an extremely successful event. It was wonderful to see so many members, families, friends, and visitors come together at Camp Reinberg for a weekend of amateur radio, learning, food, and fellowship.

Thank you to everyone who came out and helped make the weekend so memorable. I especially want to recognize those who spent many hours planning the event, transporting equipment, setting up antennas and stations, preparing food, assisting visitors, and then tearing everything down when the weekend was over.

Events like Field Day require a tremendous amount of work behind the scenes, and their success depends entirely on members who are willing to volunteer their time and talents. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.

More Summer Operating Ahead

Although Summer Field Day is now behind us, the Chicago FM Club still has a busy schedule ahead.

Our next special operating event will be POTA at Pullman

Upcoming CFMC Events

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

Fri - 7/17 | 7:00pm
Friday Night Social
D'Agostino's Pizza and Pub
3131 N Thatcher Ave
River Grove, IL 60171

Wed - 7/22 | 7:30pm
CFMC Monthly Meeting
16th District Police Station
5151 N Milwaukee Ave
Chicago, IL 60630

Fri - 7/24 | 7:00pm
Friday Night Social
Russell's Barbecue
1621 N Thatcher Ave
Elmwood Park, IL 60707

Fri - 7/31 | 7:00pm
Friday Night Social
Ricobene's
252 W 26th Street
Chicago, IL 60616

Fri - 8/07 | 7:00pm
Friday Night Social
Gulliver's Pizza & Pub
17W517 Roosevelt Rd
Oakbrook Terrace, IL 60181

Fri - 8/14 | 7:00pm
Friday Night Social
Portillo's
7308 W. Lawrence Ave.
Harwood Heights, IL 60706

Fri - 8/21 | 7:00pm
Friday Night Social
D'Agostino's Pizza and Pub
3131 N Thatcher Ave
River Grove, IL 60171

Wed - 8/26 | 7:30pm
CFMC Monthly Meeting
16th District Police Station
5151 N Milwaukee Ave
Chicago, IL 60630

National Historical Park on July 25 and 26, held in conjunction with Pullman Railroad Days. This will be another great opportunity to operate portable, make contacts, introduce visitors to amateur radio, and enjoy time with fellow club members.

Whether you are an experienced POTA operator or have never participated in an activation before, I encourage you to come out and join us.

I also hope to see everyone at our upcoming monthly club meeting on Wednesday, July 22, at 7:30 PM at the 16th District Police Station. Our monthly meetings are one of the best ways to stay informed, meet other members, and learn more about everything happening within CFMC.

Radio Expo Tickets Are Available Now

We are also quickly approaching our largest event of the year—and the club's number one fundraiser—Radio Expo 2026. This year's Expo will take place on Sunday, September 27, at the Boone County Fairgrounds in Belvidere.

Radio Expo is one of the biggest undertakings of the year for CFMC. The money raised

through this event helps support our repeaters, club programs, special events, and many of the services we provide to the amateur radio community throughout the year. Its success is extremely important to the future of the club.

Tickets are available for purchase now, so please purchase yours as soon as possible. Buying tickets early not only guarantees your admission, but also helps the Radio Expo committee plan for the event.

I also encourage everyone to help spread the word among fellow amateurs, neighboring clubs, and anyone interested in radio, electronics, or communications. Of course, we will also need plenty of volunteers, so please watch for additional information about opportunities to help.

Thank you again to everyone who helped make Summer Field Day such a success and to all those who continue to support the Chicago FM Club throughout the year.

Until we meet again, stay cool, stay safe, and keep enjoying amateur radio.-----

73,

Paul Gris | N9JZY, Chicago FM Club President



CFMC Repeaters

70 cm Repeater

443.750 (+5 MHz), 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 (-0.6 MHz), 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 GTR-800, 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 (-0.6 MHz), 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 (-1.6 MHz), 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.-----

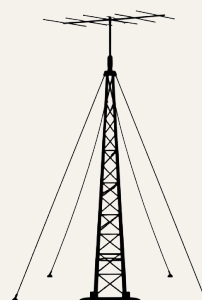
220 MHz South

224.180 (-1.6 MHz), 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 8:00pm *(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 8:30pm

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

Alan Moyzis | KC9IMF

Night Watch - 10pm

John Cerza | N9SRY

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

Joshua Hamlett | KD9MXV

Friday

Night Watch - 10pm

Marc Holland | AA9HM

Saturday

Night Watch - 10pm

Naeem Ahmed | N9DDD

Night Watch June Check-In Stats

	Call	Name	Check-Ins
1	W9BAZ	Mikey	24
2	KC9KXG	Jim	23
2	N9SRY	John	23
2	WX9LAR	Larry	23
5	KD9ZDR	Kevin	22
6	AA9HM	Marc	21
7	KD9TWA	Bill	20
8	KC9MSG	Brian	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
May	110	529
June	98	534

RADIO of the MONTH

Yaesu FTdx10

The Yaesu FTdx10 is a modern HF/50 MHz transceiver designed for serious HF operating while remaining compact enough for a typical home station. For operators interested in digital modes, contesting, DXing, or simply upgrading their HF setup, the FTdx10 offers a strong mix of performance and practicality.

One of the FTdx10's biggest strengths is its Hybrid SDR receiver design, which combines modern software-defined radio features with strong receiver performance. That can be especially helpful on crowded bands, where digital signals, contest activity, and nearby strong stations can all compete for space. The built-in spectrum display also gives operators a clear look at band activity, making it easier to see where signals are and where there may be room to operate.

That visual display is especially useful for newer digital operators. When using modes like FT4 or FT8, it helps to see signals spread across the passband rather than just listening to tones or relying only on decoded text. A good display can make digital operation feel less mysterious and more connected to what is actually happening on the band.

For FT4 and FT8 operators, the FTdx10 provides the kind of stability, filtering, and computer connectivity that make digital operation easier. When paired with software such as WSJT-X, it can handle fast digital contacts, weak-signal work, and contest-style operating without needing an overly complicated station setup.

The FTdx10 is not only a digital-mode radio. It is also a capable all-around HF rig for SSB, CW, AM, FM, RTTY, and 6-meter operation.



A station owner could use it for a weekend digital contest, a casual SSB contact, a CW event, or a 6-meter opening without needing a separate radio for each purpose.

For an operator looking to move beyond an entry-level HF transceiver, the FTdx10 is a strong step up without going all the way to a flagship radio. It offers many of the features today's operators expect, including strong receive performance, a modern display, digital-mode friendliness, and enough capability to grow with the operator over time.

With its receiver performance, spectrum display, and practical station features, the Yaesu FTdx10 is a solid choice for operators interested in digital modes, contesting, DXing, or building a capable modern HF station.-----

Jeff Wuerth | KD9RVJ, *Squelch Tale* Editor

FTdx10

- **Transmit:** HF, 6 meters
- **Receive:** HF: 30 kHz–56 MHz
- **Modes:** SSB, CW, AM, FM, RTTY, PSK/data
- **Output Power:** 100 watts
- **Antenna Tuner:** Internal Automatic
- **Memory Channels:** 99

Meeting Minutes

Chicago FM Club (CFMC) Meeting Minutes				
Date			Wednesday, June 24, 2026	
Location			16 th District, Chicago Police Department	
Meeting Called to Order			19:41	
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)	Not Present
Member Introductions - Recitation of Pledge of Allegiance - Roll Call of All Present - Total of 19 Members were present, Two Guests				
Reading and Approval of Minutes 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 Kevin, KD9ZDR and seconded by Bill, KD9TWA; The Minutes were accepted by voice vote.				
Treasurers Report - Barry, K9FMB presented the Treasurers Report and announced that the Treasurers Report is available for review by any Voting Member. - A motion was made to accept the Treasurers Report by Paul, N9ISP and seconded by Joe, K9CTA; The Treasurers Report was accepted by voice vote.				
Committee Reports - Membership Report – Jim, KD9WNR - New Members - Mac, KK7UMB (Sammamish, WA) - Nate, W9SDI (Rejoined) - Craig, KD9UQE (Rejoined) - Dan, W0EIB (Rosemount, MN) 153 Total Members 67 on Discord - VE Team Report – Bill, KD9TWA - No Test Takers in June - Two Test Takers for Field Day - Two Test Takers for July 11th - Tech Committee – John, N9SRY https://chicagofmclub.org/club-resources/cfmc-repeaters/ - New 2m Repeater installed by John, N9SRY and Greg, K9OY 2m Antenna may need Repair; Intermittent “crackling” when windy - Net Coordinator – Kevin, KD9ZDR https://chicagofmclub.org/club-resources/cfmc-nets/ - Charle, KE9ESC, taking Net Control for Thursday Tech Net - Website and Social Media – Jim, KD9WNR - Message from New Member Dan, W0EIB <i>“I really enjoy your nets and your website is visually amazing. Great job whomever put that together, as it's the best amateur radio website I've ever seen. Wow.”</i> - Squelch Tale – Jeff, KD9RVJ https://chicagofmclub.org/club-news/squelch-tale-archive/ - New delivery method; Sends in batches; Fewer bounces				

- Field Day – Bill, KD9TWA
<https://chicagofmclub.org/field-day-2026/>
 - Who's going to Field Day? All present raised their hand
 - Friday Night Social will be at Camp Reinberg
 - Doug, KD9YFR and Paul, N9ISP bringing *Boat Anchors*
 - Alan, KC9IMF and Paul, N9ISP donated Beef for Burgers
- Radio Expo – John, N9SRY
<https://chicagofmclub.org/radio-expo-2026/>
 - Charlie, W9CEF has ordered the Tickets
 - Table and Chairs need to be ordered
 - Alan, KC9IMF talked about Overnight Security
 - Need Volunteers to Cover the Gate Early
- Special Events and Ad-Hoc Committees
 - POTA @ Pullman – Kevin, KD9ZDR
<https://chicagofmclub.org/pota-pullman-2026/>
 - Use of Stakes (6 inch) for Antenna Support has been Approved
 - Need at least two Operators at all times for the two days
- Education – Charlie, W9CEF
 - Microwave Communications, Presentation by Charlie, KE9ESC

Unfinished Business

- None

New Business

- None

Adjourn

- A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Kevin, KD9ZDR and seconded by Bill, KD9TWA. The motion was passed by voice vote.
- The meeting was Adjourned at 20:38

50/50

- Tim, WD9DZV ran the 50/50; Won by Doug, KD9YFR

Post Meeting Presentation

- Microwave Communications, Presentation by Charlie, KE9ESC

A Winning Weekend for W9C

Summer Field Day was a success. The weather was great for a change. We had many attendees, played radio, and created new hams at our VE testing session.



As far as radio goes, our official submission included 454 QSOs: 145 CW (Morse code), 22 digital (FT8), and 287 phone (voice) contacts.

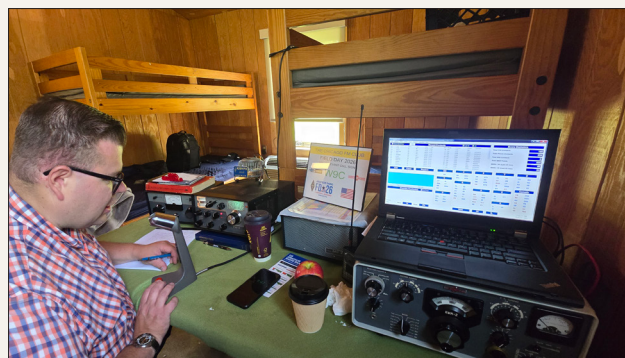
Most of our contacts were made with stations in the United States. (Happy 250th Birthday, by the way!) We also had contacts with stations in Canada, Alaska, Puerto Rico, and Costa Rica. The average DX contact was 1,036 miles from Camp Reinberg.

Our three-transmitter operation entered as Class 3A using the special-event call sign W9C. We operated primarily on 80, 40, 20, 15, and 10 meters. 40 meters was our busiest band, producing 160 contacts, followed closely by 20 meters with 159. We also made 31 CW contacts on 10 meters, showing that there was still some life in the higher bands.

Tim, WD9DZV, was the leader with 112 QSOs, representing approximately 25% of our contacts.

Doug, KD9YFR, and his amazing Boat Anchor station took the Silver with 99 QSOs, approximately 22% of our contacts.

Kevin, KD9ZDR, earned the Bronze with 75 QSOs, approximately 17% of our contacts.



Marc, AA9HM; Paul, N9ISP; Dino, KB9ORA; and Bill, KD9TWA all made contacts in the double digits.

We must acknowledge the contribution of the loggers, too. Most of the contacts were a team effort between a radio operator and logger. Way to go!

Our preliminary submitted score was 1,697 points. The contacts earned 621 QSO points, which became 1,242 points after the 2× power multiplier was applied. We also earned 455 bonus points for operating from a public location, maintaining a public information table, conducting an educational activity, promoting Field Day through social media, operating a Get On The Air station, and submitting our entry through the ARRL website.

The GOTA station used the call sign WA9ORC and helped Tom Thele make his first Field Day contact. That contact qualified for an additional five GOTA bonus points.



The weather was great Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and we had a wonderful turnout for the Club Picnic on Saturday. Fifty hams,

family members, and friends joined us for the picnic and radio operations.

Hats off to President Paul, N9JZY, for keeping the troops fed and watered. That is not an easy job. Be sure to thank Paul the next time you see him.



Besides what you saw on your plate, Paul put in A TON of behind-the-scenes work to make Field Day a success.

We also held a VE testing session under the pavilion in perfect weather on Saturday. There were four successful candidates, including the mother of one of our club members. Now mom, dad, and daughter are all hams. Chloe W2CXE's amateur radio lineage goes back to the 1920s!



Thanks to all the volunteers who helped make Field Day 2026 the great social and radio event we are known for. We had 15 volunteers for

Friday setup and 12 volunteers for Sunday breakdown.

Thanks to the guests who joined in the fun. It was great to see so many of you supporting CFMC.

Thanks to the officers and Board of Directors.

Thanks to the VE team. Great job, guys.

Finally, congratulations to our new and upgraded hams!-----

Bill Deans | *KD9TWA, VE Testing*



Summer Field Day 2026 Recap



Parks on the Air



CFMC Activates Pullman National Historical Park

The Chicago FM Club will be taking amateur radio into one of Chicago's most historic locations this July as the club hosts a Parks on the Air activation at Pullman National Historical Park.

The activation will take place on **Saturday, July 25**, and **Sunday, July 26**, 2026, in conjunction with Pullman Railroad Days. The station is expected to operate from 9:00 AM until 4:00 PM both days, and club members are needed to help provide operating coverage throughout the event.

Pullman National Historical Park is listed in the Parks on the Air program as US-7917, giving operators a chance to activate a national park site while introducing amateur radio to visitors attending one of Pullman's signature public events.

Operators Needed

Event organizers need to know as soon as possible who plans to attend and operate. Members who are available should provide the day or days they can attend, along with their approximate arrival and operating times.

This information is important because the organizers must plan the available operating space, station layout, antennas, and cable runs. CFMC will have access to a 20-by-20-foot canopy shared with another group and one table, but there will be no electrical service available. Advance planning will be essential to keeping the station on the air throughout both days.

Members do not need to commit to the entire event. Even a few hours of operating, logging, setup assistance, or public outreach can help ensure complete coverage and a successful activation.

Radio Meets Railroad History

Parks on the Air, better known as POTA, has become one of the most popular activities in amateur radio. Operators set up stations at recognized parks and make contacts with stations across the country and around the world. Some hams participate as activators from the park, while others chase those activations from home.

For CFMC, this activation is also a great opportunity to show the public what amateur radio looks like today. Visitors to Pullman Railroad Days will already be surrounded by history, engineering, transportation, and communications. Adding live amateur radio to that setting is a natural fit.

A portable station on the air can demonstrate how radio signals travel, how operators make contacts, and how amateur radio continues to connect people without relying on cell phones or the internet.

Pullman itself provides a meaningful backdrop for the event. The historic community was built around railcar manufacturing and remains closely tied to Chicago's industrial, labor, and transportation history. Activating from Pullman National Historical Park gives club

members a chance to combine radio with history in a highly visible and accessible setting.

Everyone Is Welcome

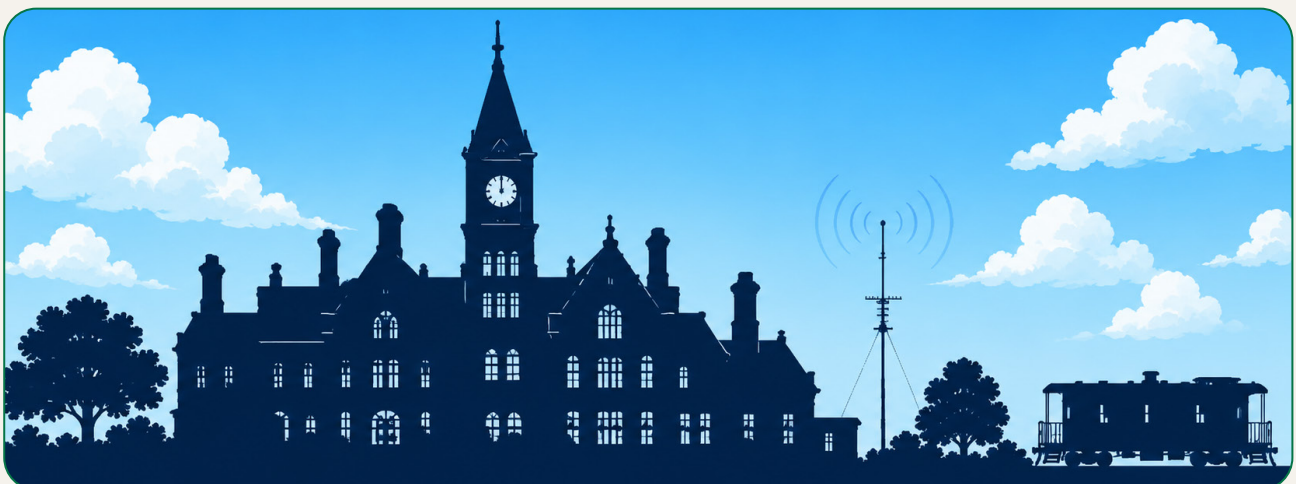
Club members are encouraged to operate, help with logging, assist with setup and teardown, answer questions from visitors, or simply spend time with fellow hams. Newer operators are especially welcome.

POTA is one of the easiest and most enjoyable ways to gain experience with HF operating, portable antennas, logging, spotting, and making contacts. Experienced operators will be available to help those who have never participated in an activation before.

Whether you can attend for the entire day or only a few hours, your participation will help make the event a success.

Members who plan to operate should contact Kevin, KD9ZDR, as soon as possible and provide the day and times they expect to attend. His contact information is available in the CFMC member roster and on QRZ.

Additional information is available on the CFMC event page at ChicagoFMClub.org.-----



July Meeting

Join us for the July CFMC meeting on Wednesday, July 22, at 7:30 PM at the 16th District Police Station. This month's program will feature ADS-B Flight Tracking, presented by AD9GZ. We hope to see you there!-----

Radio Operators Needed for the Chicago Marathon

Amateur radio volunteers are needed to support the 2026 Bank of America Chicago Marathon on **Sunday, October 11**.

Each year, radio operators are stationed with medical teams and at key locations throughout the course, helping relay important information, coordinate requests for supplies and assistance, and provide event organizers with real-time situational awareness. It is one of the Chicago area's largest and most visible amateur radio public-service events.

Operators should expect an early start, a long day, and plenty of activity. Volunteers may be assigned to medical tents, aid stations, transportation teams, or other locations based on event needs and their equipment and experience.

Hams interested in participating are encouraged to register as soon as possible through the Chicago Marathon amateur radio volunteer application, which can be found at <https://hamradiochicago.org/events>. Additional assignment, equipment, and training information will be provided to registered volunteers before race day.

Help demonstrate the important role amateur radio continues to play in public service while supporting one of Chicago's premier events.-----

Radio Expo Tickets Available Now

Tickets are now available for Radio Expo 2026, taking place on **Sunday, September 27**, at the Boone County Fairgrounds in Belvidere. Radio Expo is CFMC's largest event and the club's most important annual fundraiser, helping support our repeaters, programs, operating events, and other club activities throughout the year.

Members are encouraged to purchase their tickets as soon as possible. Early ticket sales help the Radio Expo committee plan for attendance and prepare for a successful event. Please also help spread the word to fellow amateurs, neighboring clubs, and anyone interested in radio, electronics, and communications.

Advance tickets are \$10, compared with \$12 at the gate. Purchase yours now and make plans to join CFMC for another great Radio Expo!-----

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

Tech Talk



FT4: Faster Digital Contacts and Contesting

Most hams who have spent any time on the HF bands in recent years have at least heard of FT8. Even if you have not used it yourself, you have probably seen the waterfall filled with narrow digital signals or heard the steady, chirping tones coming from the radio speaker. FT8 changed the way many amateurs think about weak-signal digital operating, making it possible to complete contacts under conditions where voice and even CW might be difficult.

But FT8 is not the only mode in the family. This month's Tech Talk will focus on FT4, a related digital mode designed to pick up the pace. FT4 keeps many of the same basic ideas that made FT8 popular, but it shortens the timing and speeds up the exchange. The result is a mode that feels familiar to FT8 users while offering a faster operating rhythm.

What Makes FT4 Different?

FT4 was developed by the WSJT-X team as a faster alternative to FT8, with contesting and quick contacts in mind. Like FT8, it uses structured messages, precise timing, and strong error correction. The basic information exchanged during a contact is familiar: call

signs, signal reports, grid squares when appropriate, and acknowledgments.

The major difference is speed. FT8 uses 15-second transmit and receive cycles, while FT4 uses 7.5-second cycles. That shorter timing allows contacts to be completed more quickly, making FT4 especially useful when activity is high and stations want to make efficient contacts.

Because the messages are structured, an FT4 contact is not a conversation in the traditional sense. It is closer to a carefully timed exchange of essential information. The software helps decode signals, prepare replies, and guide the operator through the contact sequence. The operator still chooses whom to call, where to transmit, and how to manage the station, but the exchange itself follows a predictable pattern.

Speed With Tradeoffs

That speed comes with some tradeoffs. FT4 is not quite as sensitive as FT8, so it is generally better suited to conditions where signals are reasonably strong. When the band is marginal and stations are down near the noise, FT8 may still be the better choice.

But when propagation is good, FT4 can be a very effective way to work a lot of stations in a short period of time. Instead of trying to pull every weak signal out of the noise, FT4 is often about efficiency: find a station, complete the exchange, log the contact, and move on.

This makes FT4 a good reminder that no single mode is best for every situation. FT8, FT4, CW, SSB, FM, and other digital modes all have their place. The right choice depends on band conditions, station equipment, operator goals, and the type of activity taking place. FT4 fills the space where speed matters and signals are strong enough to support the

quicker exchange.

Why Contesters Use It

For contesters, FT4 can be especially useful. The quicker exchange makes it possible to move through contacts at a faster rhythm than FT8, while still taking advantage of computer-assisted decoding. In a contest environment, where many stations may be calling at once and each completed contact adds to the score, saving even a few seconds per contact can make a difference.

A typical FT4 contact will look familiar to anyone who has used FT8. The operator selects a station calling CQ, the software helps generate the proper reply, and the exchange proceeds in a structured sequence. Accurate computer time is essential because each station must transmit and receive during the correct time slot. Most operators use a time synchronization program or service to keep their computer clock accurate.

That timing discipline is one of the things that makes FT4 work. Everyone is listening and transmitting in coordinated windows, which allows the software to decode multiple signals at once. When everything is set up correctly, a busy FT4 segment can produce a steady stream of quick contacts.

Getting on the Air

The equipment needed for FT4 is very similar to FT8. A basic station includes an HF radio capable of SSB or data operation, a computer, appropriate audio and control connections between the radio and computer, and software such as WSJT-X.

Many modern radios can handle the audio and control connection over a single USB cable, while older radios may require an external sound card interface. As with all digital modes, clean audio levels matter. Overdriving the radio will not make the signal better.

A good FT4 setup does not need to be complicated, but it does benefit from careful adjustment. Operators should pay attention to transmit audio level, radio power output, computer time synchronization, and where their signal appears on the waterfall. Starting with modest power and a clean signal is usually better than trying to force a contact with too much audio drive.

For those already using FT8, trying FT4 may be as simple as selecting the mode in WSJT-X, moving to the appropriate portion of the band, and watching the activity. For those new to digital modes, FT4 is also a chance to learn the basics of computer-assisted operating and digital signal decoding.

Another Tool in the Toolbox

FT4 is not intended to replace traditional operating. It is not a ragchew mode, and it does not provide the back-and-forth conversation of SSB, FM, or CW. Instead, it fills a specific role. It is fast, efficient, and well suited for digital contesting, DX chasing, and making quick contacts when conditions are favorable.

For operators who already use FT8, FT4 is a natural next step. For those who are new to digital modes, it is also a good opportunity to learn how computer-assisted radio operating works. Understanding FT4 means learning about timing, audio levels, band activity, digital exchanges, and how modern software helps operators complete contacts quickly and reliably.

Like many parts of amateur radio, FT4 is best understood by seeing it in action. The first time you watch multiple stations decode on the screen and see how quickly contacts can be completed, the purpose of the mode becomes much clearer.-----

Jeff Wuerth | *KD9RVJ, Squelch Tale Editor*

Chicago

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