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Make It Happen

“As Andy Milluzzi, KK4LWR, observed at the ARRL College Amateur Radio forum held at Orlando HamCation in February, ‘The Maker community is the next generation of hams.’ As this year’s round of Maker gatherings ramps up, hams need to be on the scene, making connections with these kindred spirits.”

Maker communities and makerspaces are springing up across the country, becoming the latest nexus of youthful aspirants and exotic technology, as well as the locus of highly innovative forms of experimentation — including Amateur Radio. While the Maker community embraces a wide range of interests, from robotics and 3D printing to arts and crafts; from Arduino and Raspberry Pi to toys and tools; the force that animates all of this activity is the fun and satisfaction of making things. For those of you who believe that making things is passé, even old-fashioned, take a look at our January 2017 issue, which featured an interview with Jeri Ellsworth, A16TK, a well-known figure in the Maker and gamer communities whose childhood love of making things has shaped her entire life and career. You can also catch Jeri on *Ham Nation* (<https://twit.tv/shows/ham-nation>), doing builds that prove people young and old still enjoy nourishing their inner creative force.

Maker Faires are the signature events of the Maker community — sort of a larger-scale version of our hamfests, attracting 50,000 or more participants at a single happening. The most prominent of these Maker events take place in San Mateo, California (which hosts the primary event, Maker Faire Bay Area); Chicago, and New York (at the New York Hall of Science, in Queens). And they are coming up fast, beginning this month, with the Chicago gathering scheduled for April 22 – 23 at McCormick Place; followed by Maker Faire Bay Area on May 19 – 21; and New York in September. While these major city events attract most of the national attention, similar gatherings known as Mini Maker Faires are occurring on a smaller scale in many more and dispersed locations. Be on the lookout for an event coming to a place near you.

For those of you who are serious about recruiting new members to our community, Maker Faires provide a rich environment in which to encounter like-minded individuals. This is why it’s important not only to attend and support Maker Faires; it’s also critical to have a presence to promote Amateur Radio at these events, large and small. ARRL expects to attend all three national events this year. If you can’t make the majors, find your local event and join forces. Sponsor and staff a booth or exhibit.

David Witkowski’s, W6DTW, January 2017 *QST* article, “Maker Faire Success for Ham Radio Clubs,” is a highly useful and comprehensive guide to participation. It ought to be required reading for organizers. David’s recommended strategies and tactics are invaluable if you’re planning to present ham radio at a Maker Faire. The article’s sidebar by Bruce

MacAlister, W4BRU, offers a number of valuable lessons learned at three successive RVA MakerFest events in Richmond, Virginia. I will repeat only one common theme from both David and Bruce: leave behind the heavy iron, antennas, and get-licensed handouts. Maker Faires are all about *making*, not about *watching*. Last September at the Hall of Sciences gathering in New York, we offered a simple build-a-code-practice-oscillator project that had a mere five components. The attendees were lined up six-deep in two lines. There is nothing to match the delight in the builder’s eyes when he or she first experiences the joy of oscillation. Yet it was unlikely that any of them knew a single Morse letter at the time. That will come later. Don’t expect to sign up a bunch of prospects for licensing classes right away. However, when onlookers imagine how the range and capabilities of a drone or a complex robot can be enhanced by using Amateur Radio in lieu of Bluetooth, they’ll arrive at the right conclusion quickly. Trust me: these are intelligent folks.

As distinguished from events, makerspaces are physical locations and serve as fixed gathering points for the Maker community. Located throughout the US, makerspaces offer a resource-rich environment for learning and networking. Most important, many makerspaces are equipped with sophisticated tools that are beyond the means or desires of most individuals, but that are highly approachable when shared with others — especially knowledgeable, experienced members. You may not care to own your own 3D printer right now, but you can fabricate a critical part on a sophisticated shared makerspace printer. I know that you, like me, have always longed for a three-axis lathe to fashion that impossible-to-find replacement part for your tri-bander from a cold block of metal. You may find one to use at a makerspace. And then get on with the rest of your life.

It is the overarching strategic goal of ARRL to advance the art, science, and enjoyment of Amateur Radio. We support the Maker community because it represents an important confluence of interests. Maker Faires are fertile fields for achieving that goal. Look for you there.