

HAMS WITH CLASS

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Men in Blue with Rigs

Several years ago I had the pleasure of meeting Jeff Savasta KB4JKL at the Boxboro Ham Radio Convention in Massachusetts. Jeff is a police officer with the Suffolk County Police Department in Long Island, New York. He was intrigued with the stories I told him about using amateur radio as a motivational tool for youngsters in a classroom. Police personnel have always been very supportive of my program. They are in a position to understand how important it is to interest young adults in worthwhile activities.

I really believe that a major cause of teenagers getting into trouble today is that they don't have the skills necessary to pursue interests that are challenging to them. The police officers in our area know that the children who are involved with the ham radio activities at our school have always been an asset to the community. They participate in many neighborhood events, and are among the first to volunteer when communications are needed.

One of the trips I take my ham radio classes on is to the New York City Police Academy. The communications network they use is very impressive to the children, and helps them understand the importance of clear and succinct messages in times of emergencies. It seemed perfectly natural, therefore, to invite Jeff to speak with the children at my school. I'm always on the lookout for hams with interesting backgrounds to be guest speakers for my classes at Intermediate School 72 in Staten Island, New York. As an instructor, I know how important it is to have not only an interesting person, but also a person who can convey enthusiasm and speak appropriately to the age level of the audience.

The kids were immediately attracted to his uniform and all the "goodies" he wore on his belt. If you invite police officers to visit your classroom, try to persuade them to appear in uniform. Children react well to that. My radio classes were fascinated with his stories about the importance of radio communications in his line of work. He also came prepared with a video that showed how an officer was killed because someone was fooling around and jamming the police frequency. The fact that Jeff is a ham radio operator himself gave special credence to his

presentation about how to phone in an emergency. The children felt really special when he told them that the police are especially responsive to calls that come in from hams because they know that hams tend to be responsible and reliable in reporting accidents or other kinds of emergencies that require police intervention.

Jeff's visit to my school was only the beginning of a wonderful ongoing relationship with the children in the radio program. He was soon invited back and made another excellent presentation. The great goodwill a policeman visiting the classroom can generate should not be overlooked. It is extremely important for today's youth to have respect for the fine police officers who risk their lives every day for all of us. Everyone benefited from the contact.

I was especially pleased when Jeff told me he was involved in starting up a police amateur radio club. I hope the following account which he wrote for me will serve to inspire as well as to educate others who are thinking of starting a similar group.

Jeff Savasta KB4JKL Speaks

When I decided to undertake the starting of the Police Amateur Radio Club, I didn't realize what a major task this would be. If this club were being formed by people who work a nine-to-five day, it would probably have been easier. When members work different shifts, it's more difficult to get together.

The Suffolk County Police Department is a major metropolitan police department in a tri-state area. With 2500 sworn personnel and numerous civilian employees, there is a fair population of hams within the structure. Years back, there was an attempt to form an amateur radio club, but it never made it off the organizational level. I wanted to make sure that we would be successful.

At first it was a lonely endeavor. The questions that went through my mind were never-ending. There was a lot of doubt and anxiety about laying the cornerstone of this venture. "Where or how do I start?" I asked myself often. "And when I do, what type of response will I get?"

Then, one day in November 1989, as I walked into my precinct to report for work, I noticed an individual speaking into a microphone in a foreign vehicle next to the detective squad entrance. Curious, I got closer. As I neared the vehicle, I saw a 140-150 MHz VHF antenna on its roof. The individual inside the vehicle was talking on a 2 meter transceiver.

It felt good to see another ham inside the police complex, and it felt even better to realize that he was another cop. That was the first time that I met Detective Doug Lotten N2JHO of the arson squad. I introduced myself, and an immediate bond took place, one which always happens when two hams get within 50 feet of each other. I discussed my idea of a police amateur radio club with him, and he thought it was a great idea. It was comforting to get the perspective of another amateur radio operator who is also a professional peer. We went through the ideas we both had about getting things started.

The first thing I thought we should do was get the idea reviewed and approved by the upper bureaucracy of the department. I composed an internal correspondence in February 1990, and we began the waiting process that so often occurs in large organizations. Finally, in June 1990, after being reviewed also by the department's legal bureau, it was approved by the Police Commissioner.

The perfect way to reach out to our peers was through the departmental newspaper. We wrote an article about the club and got responses. Then we put together a club constitution which took us approximately two weeks to complete. I established a preliminary list of five members and applied to the ARRL for club affiliation. We were approved, and became an affiliated organization in November 1990.

I then decided to put out a makeshift newsletter for the amateurs and nonamateurs Doug and I had talked with in the department. We were surprised at how fast word-of-mouth had spread the club idea. I am a firm believer that hams find other hams, as we are definitely a community within communities, not only in the police structure, but in everyday public life.

In January we had our first meeting. It was plain that because of our different schedules, we wouldn't be able to all meet at the same time. We did have enough members present

to carry out club business and hold elections. I was elected president; Doug, vice president; Roy LoBocchiaro KB2KOP, treasurer; and John Isbell KE2TC, secretary. John also took charge of the monthly newsletter and the logo on the letterheads.

We've sparked the interest of the nonamateurs in our department, and are becoming their elmers. We've also received favorable response from the non-police amateur community. Many local clubs have offered their assistance and use of club repeaters. We have been very pleased by this; I don't think many amateurs here in the Northeast are used to seeing the police involved in amateur radio. According to club Secretary John KE2TC, police involvement in amateur radio is more common in other parts of the country, such as the Midwest.

On a personal note, I've been to the class of Carole Perry WB2MGP at I.S. 72 in Staten Island, New York, to speak to the students about amateur radio, and on how police radio operation is similar. Most of the children in the class are intrigued and impressed by the police, as they are at a very impressionable age, and I feel that I should be the best ambassador I can be for amateur radio. Many students will remember their experience, and walk away feeling positive about themselves and amateur radio. I feel that we should all be the best ambassadors of amateur radio that we can be, both in the police and non-police sectors, as amateur radio has given us so much enjoyment and service.

Our club hopes to benefit its members and serve the public, goals all amateur clubs strive to achieve. Though amateur radio operators may come from different walks of life, we are all bound together by a common bond.

If any of you would like to write me or the club with questions and comments, address your letter to: S.P.A.R.C., Suffolk County Police Dept., 30 Yaphank Ave., Yaphank NY 11980. [Please also enclose an SASE.—Eds.] 73



Photo A. Left to right: Detective Douglas Lotten N2JHO, Arson Squad, and Officer Jeffrey Savasta KB4JKL. A fortuitous meeting leads to a new ham club.