

Pack Rat History

The MT. AIRY VHF RADIO CLUB, INC. was organized in 1956 by a group of Philadelphia area amateur radio operators who were dedicated to the promotion of VHF/UHF activity. Of 12 charter members, 2 remain active in the club and on-the-air, and we have grown and maintained a roster of 100.

The moniker "Pack Rat" seemed to develop almost instantly as the early members collected electronic parts, military and commercial surplus radio gear to convert to amateur use. The name stuck, and in 1958 the first edition of CHEESEBITS, the monthly club newsletter was published. CHEESEBITS is now in its 48th year of production, and has been filled with club and member news, and a series of technical and construction articles, written by our members and other contributors that remains as a resource for all VHF/UHF and microwave enthusiasts.

It is easy to see why we have maintained a reputation as Pack Rats since the basements, garages and "radio shacks" of the members are often overflowing with all types of radio and electronic gear for use and trade. One of the early characteristics of club members was the desire and ability to help each other get on-the-air with radios and parts that they readily shared. Fortunately, this has persisted as a theme of the club, and it has become a routine to reach out and help each other in parts acquisition, construction, testing, and antenna raising "parties." Club members have continued to be active on VHF, UHF and microwave frequencies through weekly nets, contest participation and regular operation on the amateur bands above 50 MHz both day and night. The club also maintains a repeater on 222.98/224.58MHz. Experimentation continues on frequencies as high as 76 GHz, and dozens of members have LASER communicators, operating at 440 THz. Many Pack Rats have been active with EME (earth-moon-earth) moon-bounce communication, reflecting their signals off of the moon and back to other amateurs on the other side of the earth. Club members organized a successful expedition to Columbia in 1976 to put the first 432 MHz EME station on the air from South America.

Each June finds the Pack Rats at some remote location with three yellow rental trucks full of radio equipment. The Pack Rats have been operating as a club, using our club's Matthew Gelardi Memorial call sign, W3CCX, during the June QSO Party contest for over 40 years. For about the first 20 years it was from the old civic grounds in the center of Hilltown, PA, EPA Section. Then it was Valley Forge Mountain, PA (EPA), Spruce Knob, WVA (FM08), Chestnut Ridge, PA in FN01 and most recently from atop Camelback Mountain, Big Pocono State Park in Tannersville, PA (FN21).

Over the past 53 years, the club has maintained a central core of active members, an ethic of helping each other, and has also evolved with changes in technical development and social trends. There is no denying the impact of cell phones, computers and the internet that have created both opportunities and new problems to solve. We look forward to our next 50 years of development. We meet the third Thursday of each month at the Ben Wilson Senior Center on Delmont Avenue in Warminster, PA. **Visitors are always welcome.**

More information is available at <http://www.packratvhf.com>

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