



Episode 417 – Michael Kalter, W8CI

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Eric 4Z1UG:

QSO Today, episode 417, Michael Kalter, W8CI.

Michael Kalter, W8CI, became infatuated at the radio as a young boy growing up in rural Ohio in the days of Sputnik and Kennedy's race to the moon. It wasn't until many years later that Michael joined the amateur radio ranks, becoming a leader in the Dayton Amateur Radio Association sponsors of the Dayton Ham Convention. W8CI tells his ham radio story in this QSO today. W8CI, this is Eric, 4Z1UG. Are you there Michael?

Michael W8CI:

This is whiskey eight charlie indy over.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Michael. Thanks for joining me on the QSO Today podcast. Can we start at the beginning of your ham radio story? When and how did it start for you?

Michael W8CI:

Well, Eric, I think a lot about it and it is maybe not so different than a lot of other people's, but when I was a boy, maybe 10 or 11 years old or I was just totally fascinated with radio television. My father and my grandfathers were both tool makers and tool making was okay. It provided a good living for our family. My father subsequently moved up in his company, but at that time he didn't really have any appreciation for the electrical and electronic world. And so we're talking back late fifties, early sixties, so I just verbally carbonated myself. But the thing is was just fascinating to me, how all that stuff worked. So I let my grandmother, grandparents know, Hey, if you got any old radios, anything like that, give them to me so I can play around with them. And so I was working on mess around with radios and antennas and just totally fascinated with what I could get over the air.

And as I got older, I remember buying a night kit, R55A receiver, and I was just so excited to get that. And I saved my money from a paper route that I had and I delivered a newspaper seven days a week as a lot of us did back in those days to make some money. Well, anyway, the thing finally came to mail and I was so exciting and the smell was great, even just opening the box and the picturesque materials that came with it. And I had all

these old catalogs, you probably remember, the Lafayette catalogs, the Allied Supply, just loved those catalogs. And the Night Kit, I just was so excited to get this thing. And then I built it and it took me quite a while to build it. I went through the instructions and the instructions were really pretty good.

And at that time I was just learning how to solder. So I put this thing together and it was in a summer and I remember soldering things up and I would solder and solder would drop down onto my socks and my legs and I had shorts on and I still have the scars from the solder burning into my legs.

Eric 4Z1UG:

We all do.

Michael W8CI:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Love it. And the incense of that time was that burning solder and it just smelled so good. And then I just felt like, okay, I'm what's happening here. This is what's happening. And this was at the time when Sputnik went over and we're starting to put satellites in sky. And my buddies and I would stay out late at night and be on this hillside and we'd lay there and look up and go, "There he is. There it is." And the excitement, to me, it's hard to describe because President Kennedy came on TV and he was talking about we're going to put a man on the moon by the end of the sixties. I was so excited that we're doing all this technical stuff and listening to the radio, what is all that stuff on the radio? Do you remember Eric? There was even a song that commemorated our move into satellites and that was Tel Star and was, I mean, that was a top song and that was just wonderful.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I think you're a little bit older than me.

Michael W8CI:

I would tell you I am 72 years old.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So I'm 65, so I missed Tel star, but I'm going to find the song and put it up too.

Michael W8CI:

Oh, it is wonderful. But for me, it was such an inspiring age and inspiring time and getting that radio going and listening up and down the bands. I would go up one real slow then down and I would just listen and listen and listen and I would hear all the different sounds and the news teletypes and all those things, people speaking in other languages, and so I was so engrossed by it. So I wanted to get an amateur radio license at that time. I was the

oldest of six children and my father was the only person that drove. And we lived in a suburban area.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What was the hometown?

Michael W8CI:

Kettering, Ohio. It was just beginning to grow a little bit. And so it was a nice place. Kettering, Ohio is located, oh see, south of Dayton probably right now about 10 miles, maybe more, maybe approximately that to Xenia, Ohio to where we have the convention now. So anyway, I found a club in Kettering and I made it to the meetings. I found a bus that would run somewhat close to there, and I went to the meetings. I was just a kid, when I say kid, maybe 12 years old, 11, 12 years old at that time. So I went to the meetings and they made me equipment chairman and I said, "Okay, great. I'm part of this." So that meant to bring all this junk home to my house. And my father just, he went ballistic. He said, "Son, they're taking advantage of you."

And that really alienated my father from that organization and I had to contact and say I can't do this anymore. And it truly was junk when I looked back on it, but to me it was pretty cool junk. It's like having a flea market in my basement. So then I got real involved with school and I couldn't belong to that group. So I did well in school and then I went off to college and those sorts of things. And then I ended up getting married and having children along the way.

Eric 4Z1UG:

You didn't get the amateur radio license in the end in high school?

Michael W8CI:

No, I didn't at that time, no. And I did meet a fellow that had his license, so he and I talked a lot about it, but he was just so busy and I was busy with trying to get to the school activities and the newspaper route and everything. So no, I didn't get it in high school and I sure missed out on that. I sure wish that would've.

Eric 4Z1UG:

You had this interest in electronics and radio. Did you have that interest through high school and did that make any impact in terms of how you chose what to do with your life afterwards?

Michael W8CI:

Well, I discovered I had a real love of science and mathematics and I pretty much excelled in that. And my family didn't have any money. I went to an engineering college, which was called General Motors Institute of Technology, and I went there for a couple of years. And

then at that time, life took over, I would say parties took over, things like that. And I dropped out of school. At that time I did. I subsequently went back to school and got a master's degree and in some ways I regret it, some ways I didn't.

But I got into electrical and electronic repair and really excelled at that. I felt like I did. And I just loved working on machinery and keeping it running. I mean, I'm talking about CNC type machinery and things like that. And it was really exciting to do that and got a really good understanding of electrician electronics. And along the way, of course, had to take a lot of classes and I took a class from by guy who was a ham radio operator and he said, Oh yeah... remember the Voyager spaceships that went out? Amazing?

Eric 4Z1UG:

The probes, space probes, there's two of them.

Michael W8CI:

Right? Oh yeah. And at that time he was saying, "Well, we're doing a fly by right now and at my house, I'm getting the fastest pictures of it." And I was like, "Really?" And he was a great teacher of electronics, you know electronics theory and I wish I would've kept track of him, but he was much, much older than me. He'd be probably 140 right now. But at any rate, he was very inspiring to me and I learned a lot from him. And then as time went on, I also had my family and I have five children and my wife, she just retired. She was a school teacher. She taught special intervention in the Yellow Spring school system. And she's also a certified Montessori teacher. And so if anything about education, it doesn't pay much.

So we're raising five kids, living out in the country and I bought a piece of land that was beautiful piece of land that probably was a little bit beyond my means, but I kept it and worked really hard, as much as I could. And we raised those children and they did 4H, they got into all sorts of things and what they got into, I got into it with them. So I also became a community activist in a way. I joined, I was a volunteer with our fire department and got my EMS certifications and I ran the medical rescue and fire rescue.

Well, there was a bad plane crash near my house on a Christmas day evening. And so I got the call over the radio and first one on the scene because they were right down the road from me. A lady who had been in the airplane, she was the only person that made it to a road and southern part of Green County where I live about six or seven miles south of Xenia, Ohio, it's is a very rural area and lots of farm land trees that's beautiful, but it's very rural.

So she pointed the direction that she thought the crash was in and she had two children that she said, "I pulled my children out of the wreckage and I put them under a tree, but I don't know how they're doing." And so she was totally pretty much hysterical. And there's a policeman there. So I just left and I hiked back and I finally found the scene and there was a helicopter buzzing above trying to find them and there was a fog coming in. And so I had my two-way radio, which was a fire radio and a fire frequencies and I had to make contact with our dispatcher six or seven miles away to contact the helicopter and let them

know just about where I was and please turn on the spotlights or something so I could get a little bit more visual down there.

Well, I found the two children and I didn't have much time to react. They were both alive and one of them was crying, but the other one was pretty much unconscious and was fading fast. And I did a rescue breathing on them. That baby was two years old for about 45 minutes. And if you've ever done CPR or what we call rescue breathing, and that's very, very strenuous. And so I did that until the rest of the crew could catch up with me. I had to go get counseling after that. I mean, the baby eventually died, but the mother was very, very thankful that I kept the baby alive long enough that she could be with the baby when he passed.

Eric 4Z1UG:

How big of a crash was that like a passenger airliner or was it a small plane?

Michael W8CI:

It was like a Beechcraft, maybe a eight or 10 passenger, I don't remember the model. And it went out against... Couldn't make it back. He had an airstrip in his backyard and he just was short of gas. He couldn't get there. He hit a bunch of trees and it was very devastating to his family, mean he passed and his son died. I mean, I don't want to describe how the carnage looks, but if you've ever been to a serious wreckage like that, it's a lot to take. And so at the time, it doesn't bother me, but afterwards I came home and I was happy to see my children, but I was pretty shook. And not only did I need counseling and I consider myself a pretty tough guy. So part of my therapy was I'm going to get an amateur radio license. And so it didn't take me very long at that time.

I had a pretty strong electronic background and it just took a few months and I had passed my extra and plus the 20 word a minute code. And it was very satisfying for me to do that, but it kept me focused on something other than thinking about that. So it was a therapy in a way for me. And that's what really brought me around to amateur radio was the frustration of not being able to communicate to that helicopter that was right above me when there might have been a way with amateur radio, I could have gotten into the repeater easier and then relayed some information. But nevertheless, that didn't happen.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What year was that?

Michael W8CI:

'91, I think. Something like that. 1991.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And so therefore you were in your forties?

Michael W8CI:

I was early forties, right. I was an old guy.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I think that's pretty amazing. And as a result of that, obviously you've got five children who are watching you survive this event, and I have some experience unfortunately with terrorist bombings that you're able to pull yourself together and do it around something like amateur radio. Did that inspire any of your kids to also try to do that with you?

Michael W8CI:

Not to do amateur radio, although my oldest daughter has her master's degree from Purdue University in electrical engineering and works for the North American Space Intelligence Center. And she's brilliant and she's come over to the house and seen my setup. I have a really nice, I think, a very nice setup and big 43 inch K screens and she would watch the waterfalls and she goes, "Dad, how do about all this?" And said, "I just study it."

And so one of my son-in-laws was there who also works for NASIC, and they said, "Well, we're just learning about this stuff now." I think they do electronic surveillance, but she can't really talk about what she does. So she's involved with it electronically and the communications world. And then the next oldest daughter is, she's a professor at The Ohio State University and she is an infectious disease physician.

Well, she specializes in infectious disease, but she's an internal medicine doc and she is one of the people that has worked to help set some of the parameters in the state of Ohio with the governor back when COVID was really bad. And then number three daughter, she didn't do anything electrical, but she's has her master's in early childhood education and number four daughter is also a doctor and she works outside of Washington, DC and Western Virginia. And she got bored with a family practice and she really likes emergency medicine. I think she likes the stress of it. And so she's working in urgent care and just absolutely loves it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Or the adrenaline rush of it.

Michael W8CI:

Yeah, that could be. And then my son, who is the youngest, he got his degree in physics, honors physics at The Ohio State University. And then he went to law school there at Morris Law School at Ohio State. And he is an intellectual property attorney, now works in Madison, Wisconsin for a very high tech company and loves what he does. And so I have some amazing children and a very supportive wife. And so that's been my start in amateur radio career. But when I jumped into it, Eric, I don't get into things part way. If I get into it, I go pretty deep. And so that led me to become very involved with amateur radio in the

region and Hamvention almost simultaneously. And so it didn't take long after that. I'm a business guy is what I ended up doing. I did the electronic, but I went back to school and got a master's in business. And so I have done business turnarounds, mergers and acquisitions and have been really successful at it.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And now this message from Icom America. Heard it worked, it logged it. This summer keep your competitive contesting edge with Icom. Our high powered base stations cut through pile ups letting you work the bands and log those contests from the comfort of your home or remotely with the RSBA1 app. The Icom IC 7851 gives you a new window into the RF world and its on air excellence is unparalleled. With faster processors, high input gain, high display resolution, and a cleaner signal, it's truly the pinnacle of HF perfection. Features include dual receivers, digital IF filters, memory keyer, digital voice recorder, high resolution spectrum waterfall display, enhanced PC connectivity, and an SD memory card slot. The Icom IC 7610 is the SDR every Ham wants. This high performance SDR can pick out faint signals in the presence of stronger adjacent signals. The ICON IC 7610 is a direct sampling software defined radio that has changed the world's definition of an SDR transceiver.

Its features include RF direct sampling system, 110 DBR R MDR, independent dual receiver and dual digicell. Create your own band openings with the Icom IC 9700. This transceiver brings direct sampling to the UHF VHF week signal world. This all mode transceiver is loaded with innovative features that are sure to keep you busy, that include faster processors, higher input gain, higher display resolution, and a cleaner signal. This has become the new de-facto standard as a base band rig for microwave operation as well. Features include 4.3 inch touchscreen color TFT, LCD, real-time high speed spectrum scope and waterfall display, smooth satellite operation with 99 satellite channels, dual watch operation and full duplex operation in satellite mode. The Icom IC 7300 is a high performance innovative HF transceiver with a compact design that will far exceed expectations. This innovative HF transceiver digitizes RF before various receiver stages reducing inherent noise in different IF stages.

The IC 7300 changed the way entry level HF is designed. It is the go-to rig in my station now and I love it. Features include RF direct sampling, 15 discrete band pass filters, large 4.3 inch color touch screen, real time spectrum scope, and an SD memory card slot. Just know that you'll be very pleased with one of these fine rigs to enhance your contest DX and general ham radio operation in your station. Be sure to check out these Icom rigs and their full line of base stations and portable radios at an amateur radio dealer near you. And when you make that purchase of a fine Icom rig, be sure to tell your dealer that you heard about it here on the QSO Today podcast. And now back to our QSO Today, you had a manufacturing company up to 2007, 2008?

Michael W8CI:

Very good. I did.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What was that business? What did you manufacture?

Michael W8CI:

I manufactured quartz, the machine quartz, and we would buy our quartz from General Electric, the special materials group in Cleveland, Ohio. And they would mine the quartz very high pure quartz in somewhere along the east coast. And then they'd send me these great big ingots and I would have to cut them up and then machine them into very high precision pieces that would then line machines that would make IC chips. And so it was very interesting work and I got to do a fair amount of traveling and most of my customers were located in California near San Francisco or in Singapore or in Arizona or up in Portland.

Eric 4Z1UG:

How did you find your way into that business? I mean that seems pretty specialized and it doesn't seem like an Ohio country lads business.

Michael W8CI:

You're right, it wasn't. But what happened was is that I had worked in different businesses and done these turnarounds and I got a phone call, you kind of develop a reputation of doing that, and I get calls still, I go to steel mills and go wherever and ran a company for while turning it around or preparing for sale. That's how I got into it. And it's just word of mouth and so they didn't have a lot of money to pay me, but they said if you get this thing turned around, we're going to give you, I think it started out at 20% of the business. And I said, I'll take that. And I turned it around and then I ended up buying the business.

And then a few years after that some investors came and they said, "We'd like to buy your business." And I really wasn't greedy but I thought, well this would give me an opportunity to go ahead and go to the same place every day because that really was ready to do something different than go to the same place every day. So I sold it, I did well on it and just went back to doing what I continue to do. And I've worked in all sorts of different industries and businesses and primarily manufacturing and manufacturing I want to say is manufacturing. And there's a lot of things that follow through in terms of leadership from almost any kind of an organization and you just look where the issues are and then you look and work. I like to work very collaboratively to get things turned around. So that's what I've done for a living and continue to do so.

Eric 4Z1UG:

When you first got your license in 1991, what was the first rig that you put on the air?

Michael W8CI:

Well it was a Drake TR-4 transceiver. And it's interesting, my mentor at that time, Keith Baker KB1SF and I don't know if you've ever heard of him, I was getting his call is Keith Baker one satellite fanatic and he was president and then treasurer. He's been involved with AMSAT for many, many years, but he was really, still to this day, is very excited about amateur radio And he always told me, "Pay it forward, pay it forward, pay it forward." But when I first put the thing up and I got my dipole out and got this thing cranked and I was so excited and he came down and helped me get on the air the first few times and it was a good lesson to me in mentoring and then followed through, not just telling somebody get your license but actually coming over and helping me.

And to this day, and I work lots, I love HF, I'm on the radio a lot and I really enjoy it. And although I'm not a contester, I have some good friends that are contesters, but I just have a hard time, I don't know, sitting there and doing it for a really long time. But I appreciate contesters and so I like DX and it's the chase and I like being people coming after me and I like chasing the DX and because of that in my work with amateur radio, I've had a chance to travel around the world for amateur radio.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I know that you went around the world, you even spoke Germany for an organization called the National Institute of Amateur Radio. And frankly I'd never heard of the National Institute of Amateur Radio. And I wanted to know, was this what you're talking about in terms of an opportunity to represent amateur radio around the world?

Michael W8CI:

Right. Actually that is in India.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So this is the Indian National Institute of Amateur Radio.

Michael W8CI:

Yes. Maybe I should be clear on my page. Thank you for that. But very amazing group. They were wonderful to work with, but it was working a job every day I was there and they took me around the country and I spoke with what would be the equivalent FCC on government people about how we handle amateur radio in this country.

Eric 4Z1UG:

In terms of the no code license?

Michael W8CI:

No, no. In just getting a license and how long it took. Over there would take about a year to get a license

Eric 4Z1UG:

Because of its bureaucracy?

Michael W8CI:

Yes. And not only that, say you were a 13-14 year old girl and you got your license and you have these government people coming to the house and "Why do you want an amateur radio license? Who are you going to talk to?" And it became a little bit intimidating. So now they have absolutely turned all that around. They even teach radio in their curriculum, I think in the high school curriculum. And they have a very, very vibrant program of bringing youth in and just keeping people interested in amateur radio over there. I'm totally impressed with what they're doing there in India. It's a country that needs emergency communications.

Eric 4Z1UG:

With what, 1.3 billion people, it's an amazing market for just about everything because it's 1.3 billion English speakers.

Michael W8CI:

Yes it is. And they're just wonderful people. I was treated so well there. I really liked it. And to this day I stay in touch with them and they come over to ham convention or go bring contingencies over and that was also part of in my opinion and international outreach that I saw that Ham Benson needed to do. And back in the days, I'm a former general chairman of Ham Benson and I thought that we really needed to reach out to people all over the world. They were coming anyway, so let's make them feel comfortable and let's welcome them and then let's win this dialogue with different countries and yeah, I got to speak in Germany, I think I've spoken there a couple of times, but I got to be a keynote speaker once, which was a very high honor for me. And I basically just spoke on the importance of the brotherhood and sisterhood of amateur radio in the world and it was incumbent and is incumbent on all of us to represent our cultures and as best that we can and to maybe take a high minded path instead of at a political dialogue.

We talk about what we're doing with our families, what is going on within our hobby. And I really enjoyed that and I met a lot of people through that. And so I enjoy it, and I've been to Japan three or four or five times, I forget how many times a great event over there that they have. The Japanese in Tokyo, the hamfest they have there.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Japan has what, 2 million hams. The number is fantastic for the size of the population.

Michael W8CI:

It is. I think there are so many countries now that are really excelling and what I have found is how many young women or young girls love amateur radio and they like the

different aspects of it and they want to get involved and what modes, how can they get involved and what can they do? Not that I many guru on that, but I do see it happening and I'm really excited that it is happening.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well, you've been around a bit. Are there any countries that you can think of in your travels that are getting the kids into amateur radio better than the United States is? And if they are, what are they doing that's different?

Michael W8CI:

I will say Germany is working very hard on it and I don't know that they're doing anything different. I think that all of us and in India, well what India does is different. It's in their school curriculum but they have a hard time getting equipment in India, there's a lot of people there, but it's hard to buy radio equipment and getting equipment in and out. I know with some of my friends, I said I'll just send you this radio, be careful doing that. But to get back to answer your question, I think United States does a pretty good job. I think we could do better. I think with the STEAM schools, the STEM schools, we need as amateurs to be sure that we have a clear cut message about amateur radio and how a youth can get involved. I've seen some wonderful videos over the years. I know in Great Britain they work really hard on this too. And I think that most amateur radio communities in the world are working hard at doing this where they can. So I can't say one country's better than another.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I guess I'm not thinking necessarily in terms of better, but it seems to me that I interviewed some kids a few episodes back, I get the impression that at least in the West, not just America, the kids are so over programmed that having time for amateur radio seems like that that would be a big challenge. I know here in Israel, I can't imagine that the kids have any time to spend on something like amateur radio with all of the other things that they have to do during the day. So it seems to me that the life is different than it was when we were kids. I mean we'd come home from school and we had nothing but time to pursue amateur radio or chasing snakes or whatever it was that was our fancy.

Michael W8CI:

I think that is an excellent observation. I have 10 grandchildren and my oldest grandchild, wonderful young lady who is 16 years old now, she announced to me, she calls me Papal, she said, "My friend and I would really like to volunteer with Ham, we're interested in amateur radio." I was totally floored. And so I'm going make that happen and get her one of those online... Because kids are so good at online learning and studying and things like that. I wanted to get her one of those programs that she can learn at her own pace and help her with that.

And then a friend of mine who runs the library system here in Green County, Ohio where Xenia is, he and I become pretty good friends and he's a rotary member and he had asked me to speak about... mention an amateur radio at a rotary meeting and I did.

He became so fascinated he got his license. Well we had a field day event and so I just did it here from my house and invited some of my good friends over. And so he came and brought his daughter and we coached her how you write out everything, this is what you need to say when you're on the air. And we had it all written down for it. First few times she was tongue tied and she really wanted to do it and then after a while you couldn't get a microphone back from her, not that we wanted to. And so I had a really nice award that I gave her and actually from all of us. And so he was just absolutely excited that his daughter is now... She's got her general class license and he's just recently got a license too. So we're kind of mentoring them to try to make sure that they stay active and thrilled with it. So I don't know how she does that with everything else that she's got going on, but there has to be a way that we get that burning desire into a youth like we had.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I was almost mentally ill with it as a kid. Passionate about amateur radio was an understatement. Let me ask you though, I'm curious because you have a granddaughter that may be interested, and a friend who may be interested in amateur radio, why wouldn't you turn her over to a club or a club class or something like that? Is that something that it's not available or it's something that you felt for her and her friend was not the right direction?

Michael W8CI:

Well my granddaughter is a dancer. I mean they go to national competitions she would not have time to drive over here for another class. And she has two younger sisters and it's hard for them all to get out and around. That's why because I would love to, if she was that interested, if I could get her interested in a class, she would do it. But I will say that in Green County, matter of fact, up at the expo center, the fairgrounds expo center where we have Hamvention, our late sheriff Gene Fisher was very avid Ham and actually, he got his license after we moved Hamvention to Xenia. And he was just excited about it. "I'm going to be part of this," got his license, got his general class, he'd come down to my house and hang around and I put some new beams up and he said, "Hey, I want to come down and help you Michael."

And he did. And so he was working on setting up a 4H club for youth to learn about amateur radio. And just now they've got a space, they've got a beautiful big beam antenna and radios and they're just now beginning to have the classes. That's a good question, but I wish I could get her to do that.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I want to take a minute to tell you about my favorite podcast, The Ham Radio Workbench podcast with George KJ6VU and now joined by Rod VA3ON, Mike VA3MW, Mark N6MTS

and Vince VE6LK. Every two weeks, George and Company offer up a status report on the many amateur radio projects on their workbenches and explore projects on their guest work benches. This group is project active and prolific covering many technical areas of amateur radio. So the next time you want a deep dive into ham radio, electronic project building or to learn about technology tools, test equipment, construction techniques and the rest, listen to the Ham Radio Workbench podcast available on every podcast player and channel. Use the link in this week's show notes page to get to the Ham Radio Workbench podcast directly. And now back to my QSO.

When you mentioned 4H I kind of think of calves and pigs, animals, raising livestock. I didn't realize that 4H could be a project or a club for ham radio. Is that unusual out there?

Michael W8CI:

Yes, and we are kind of pioneering it. We're trying to make that happen because in community of youth and 4H wants to serve as many youth as possible, they do some other things that are maybe not quite agriculturally related. They do photography, they do sewing, they do things like that, but they don't do anything quite like amateur radio. But why not? And they like the idea of it. So there's a group that's really working hard to make this happen.

Eric 4Z1UG:

It's my understanding that the Dayton area is, I guess considered now part of the Rust Belt meaning that at one time it was a center for auto manufacturing or manufacturing of equipment that went into the auto industry. Am I right on this? And then it changed and that industry disappeared.

Michael W8CI:

That's true. However, there are lots and lots of very high level machining manufacturing companies that have spawned in this region because of that. And so it's a pretty thriving area, especially out around in Green County, near Wright Patterson Air Force Base, there's lots of firms that really do a lot of work in high technology things. So it's having a rebirth in a way, in my opinion.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What's the impact of the Hamvention on the area?

Michael W8CI:

You can imagine that the population of Xenia is about 26,000. So we bring in about 32,000. And so most of those people will be staying in hotels and motels and will be eating out, spending a lot of money. There's a lot of tax money that will come in from that. But it's a very positive effect. We work with the community and the community has really welcomed us. We work with fire departments, police departments, the Convention and Visitors

Bureau and other organizations to be sure that we have a first class event and that they are comfortable with it. The school system, Xenia Community Schools closes down in honor a Hamvention mainly because I don't think they could get their buses through real easy during that time.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Having been there twice, I was here the last time, and I thought that the management of the traffic was masterful, really well done. I don't think it took us anytime at all to go from the hotel and get parked and into the area in the morning at least Friday morning when I went. So I thought it was quite amazing. Are you saying that the regular citizens of Xenia actually understand what this event is and its impact it has on Green County?

Michael W8CI:

Oh yeah, they definitely do. I have spoken at numerous events where people want to know what is Hamvention, what's that about, what is ham radio about? And so I try my best to explain it, the scientific aspects of it and in a way that they can all understand it and get it. So that has been very fruitful and having people like our director of the library system who's totally supporting it too and who can speak on it now and the fire departments, the sheriff's departments and a lot of those people are getting their license. And you have to remember that a lot of this area in Green County is a lot of very technical people.

My daughter who works at NASIC, which is at North American Space Intelligence Center, which is at Wright Patterson Air Force Base, she says, "Dad, all these people know you, All these ham nerds know you, Dad." I said, "Well, I'm probably one of the top nerds in the area for being known." And so we have the benefit of that happening as well. And we are very proactive in working with the community if they need anything in terms of like the Air Force marathon, it's a very big deal here and we'll have Dayton Amateur Radio Association will have their vehicle out there and we'll have a lot of hands working out there at that event to help with communications.

Eric 4Z1UG:

You've been involved with DARA I think since 2005, so we're coming up on almost 20 years now. What has the impact been on DARA'S membership as a result of moving to Xenia and involving the town of Xenia? Are you seeing that many new hams? Has the club itself doubled or tripled in size as a result of these changes that have been made to an event that goes all the way back into the fifties? I mean I think the Dayton Hamvention started in like 1958.

Michael W8CI:

Okay, let me correct you on a couple things. It started in 1952 and I started being involved with Hamvention, maybe I would say at a lower level soon after I got my license in 91- 92 I would say. And then I got much more involved in it because I did business turnarounds

and things like that, Hamvention was having a problem in the early two thousands. We were actually paying for somebody to run that whole event for us. Well that person we were paying was absconding with the money because we thought how in the world are we losing money on this event when we have all these people here? And so we took the guy to court and they asked me to come in at that time to help with trying to get things turned around, it was basically turnaround operation. So that's when I got really involved with it back at that time in terms of the leadership part of it.

So that's a little known story because part of agreement we had to make with all the attorneys was that, well we couldn't get money from this guy anyway because we were way low on the list, all the banks and that were after him. Evidently he had done some nefarious things and in order to close a book on it, we had to agree not to talk about it for five years. Well that five years went by and so now I don't mind mentioning it. And that's when we became totally all volunteer was back in that time. And so that has really actually been a blessing in disguise to where we just as a lot of amateurs that you would say are running this big event and we're not counting on professional help other than the professionals ham radio operators who do this sort of thing for a living.

And so that's, I think it really made the change. Now in 2017 or so, well right before that we knew that Hera arena where we used to have Hamvention was going downhill and we knew that they had a lot of tax problems. As a matter of fact, the very last Hamvention that we had there, I had to write a letter to the local tax collectors and the IRS and say, "Is there any way you can avoid having any kind of foreclosure on this place until after Hamvention?" And I explained all the benefits of Hamvention and they agreed, but we kept all that really quiet. We weren't went out telling anybody that and we really wanted to see them get turned around and maybe get a buyer. It just couldn't happen. And it was so far in the disrepair, but I'll tell you, the people that owned her, the Wampler family was really, really great.

So people had asked me, "Why did you stay so long with them? Why didn't you move earlier?" And I thought they were turning around. But the other thing is, back when we had a guy that was absconding with all of our money, I told you that story, we didn't have enough money to pay Hera. We didn't have money, enough money to pay the buses and a whole lot of other people, security things like that. So we had to ask each one of them, "Can you hold up for year till we get this done?" And they agreed. So wasn't very excited to leave people who had really worked with us when we could have gone downhill. That's story I don't put out there a lot, but that's a very true story. And it was a very dark, difficult time. I was president of our club back then.

I hadn't run Hamvention, but I was president of the club and it was really a difficult thing. And then to have kind of a gag order for five years was even a little bit more difficult because the members wanted to know. Now you asked the question though about membership and we are right around 900 to a thousand members. We are an international organization and we have lots and lots of members from around here, but we have a lot of members from all over the world who really support and want to be part of Dayton. And we have people come in and they want to volunteer all weekend and they

come in and volunteer and they're members. And so we're really, really happy about that. But the membership is growing. We were stunned at the last ham on the Sunday of Hamvention, we had just lines of people wanting to join up, pay dues.

And I'm not really sure why, but I certainly appreciate it and we're happy to have them because people join because I do want to mention one other thing about this, Eric, if I can, is that we don't do this to make a ton of money. We do give money to a lot of other amateur radio events, say like scholarships. We give that money to scholarships, we give money to ARRL, we give money to other organizations that we see that need some money that we can help out. We consider ourselves just a strong pillar in the amateur radio community like you are and what you're trying to do with the expo that you're going to put on. And so many different people do. You are a pillar because you are putting on all these QSO shows. And I think that this is another great step that we're making in amateur radio is that using the media so well on getting information out about amateur radio, about people, about what it's going on.

And I used to think, "Oh boy, there's another guy, I got a camera and he's going to have a web show." But there are a lot of really, really good shows out there. I learned so much and I didn't realize how stupid I was about a lot of things and about how much more there is to learn about amateur radio. Hope I answered that question.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Yeah, I think so. Do you think that you are traveling around the world representing DARA and the Hamvention and creating this international membership or at least international interest in it, do you think that that is what has kind of re-infused Dayton? Because it sounds to me like up until the turnaround, it's very possible the Hamvention would've died a slow but painful death and it's been kind of resurrected here. I had a great time, what can I tell you? And I don't usually, but I had a great time going this last time and it was just so well done, so delightful. I hope people aren't saying, "Oh God Eric, he's going on and on." But it was just so well done. So do you think that making this an international event has recharged it?

Michael W8CI:

I'm not going to take any credit for recharging it. I think that we put a lot of focus on marketing and timing and releasing information and making sure that we get the word out there and on an international basis, but I think that the world of amateur radio operators has become very international just itself. And I think that people from all parts of the world are very interested. I know when I was traveling to India, my way to India, I stopped into Doha Qatar, which is a major airport there. And I thought, well, I'm going to be there, I'll stay there for a few days and go talk to my friends from Doha. And man, I mean they were just so happy for me to come. And then they had a couple events later, I bet I flew back and forth from there eight or 10 times and I met with one of the Emirs and he was the founder of the Qatar Amateur Radio Club and he had an entourage with him and it was kind of funny.

He spoke very good English. He had gone to the Michigan State University and I told him, and he was about my age, and I said, "When I was young, I used to dial up and ride the dial up and down on the short wave and I wonder all these people, what are they talking about? Where are they from?" And I said, "I bet I heard your families on that radio. And he goes, I thought the same thing when I was dialing up and down." So it's very interesting how maybe just stopping in and saying hello to people in other countries and how powerful that was. That ended up, our meeting was in several of the newspapers throughout the Gulf. I was like, oh, got my picture on the paper in the Gulf.

But it was more for communicating what amateur radio's about and my feeling and our feeling. I think you agree with me, it's the brotherhood, sisterhood of amateur radio in the world. And every time that Hamvention happens, if it's during Ramadan, they don't come because they want to honor, as you do, the creator in their way.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And it's a rough month if you're fasting all day long every day.

Michael W8CI:

Oh, I lived in Tunisia. I was in a Peace Corps in Tunisia back in the seventies. And I definitely understand, I can tell you stories about that. You wouldn't want to hear it, but it was very interesting. But what I've met is that generally people would always say, "Aren't you worried about going in that part of the world?" And you live in a very difficult part of the world. And no, I'm not worried. I mean, it's not like I'm going to go out there, make myself a target and I'm with friends and they'll help guide me to what I need to do.

I never really had problems in pretty rough spots in India or in other parts of the world. And it's just like you say, have confidence. But it was usually with my amateur radio friends, and I was mentioning that even though they don't come, they'll call me on the phone to say, "Hey, I hope everything's going good. Good luck with the event," I'm passing on to everybody. So to get back to your question, it isn't anything that I've done. I think that we all do that because amateur radio is making the world shrink a little bit, especially through media outlets like yours.

Eric 4Z1UG:

We will return to our guest in just a moment. Nuts and Volts Magazine is a new sponsor and it's an amazing resource for new and old hams alike. Click on the banner to get your online or paper subscription of Nuts and Bolts. A new way to show your support of the QSO Today podcast is to buy me a coffee. I consume gallons of coffee to create this weekly podcast. Invite me for coffee by pushing the yellow button. Buy me a coffee on the QSO Today show notes page. And now back to our QSO today. Are you optimistic about the future of ham radio? I mean, I've had this conversation with 416 previous hams, some are, some aren't. Are you optimistic about the future of ham radio?

Michael W8CI:

Well being number 417, I don't know if you're taking a poll on this, but my answer is absolutely optimistic. And I think that the reason I'm optimistic, we are at a new age of innovation, I think in amateur radio. I mean, can you keep up yourself with all the advancements, all the nuances, all the things that are happening in amateur radio and the new radios and the new things that are going on that make it more exciting? I try to look at every day I want to learn about something and I am very optimistic and I'm seeing a lot more younger people when I say younger, thirties and forties, getting involved in it as well. That'll help offset some of the old guys like me that how many more years do I have at this? I don't know. I'm thankful for every day, but I'm optimistic and I'm optimistic when I hear my granddaughter said, "Papal, I'm interested in that."

And when I see younger people that are kind of looking to understand something exciting and something new, they get tired of flipping through their phones and playing the games. I think that age may be passing a little bit to where they're going, "Hey, let's do something more exciting here. How else can I communicate in the world?" And it's up to us, you and me and every amateur radio operator who's been around for a little while to keep pushing it. And I am totally optimistic. And I think it holds a real key for the our civilization to understand each other's cultures plus to even grow the technology to even a more fantastic place.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Certainly the internet has created this ability for us to share almost instantly, right? As soon as there's an innovation that's out and everybody knows about it.

Michael W8CI:

I love that. I mean, it is, I just love all the innovations and stuff. It just seemed like a few years ago, you'd wait a couple of years and there would be some new radio that would come out or some new technology. Now it's continuous. I love it. I mean, it is just absolutely amazing the things that are coming out right now. And to be able to couple the computer power and the internet power that we have right now and technology that we've learned. In picking the amateur gear, I have met some absolutely fantastic people that really push an amateur radio to new limits, whether it's... the way we choose who the amateur of the year or the technical achievement or special achievement or club of the year, what have they done for the greater good of amateur radio? And it's amazing when I see some of these people come through, what they are doing and the clubs.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I agree with you a hundred percent. It's so exciting what's happening now. What do you think though is the greatest challenge to amateur radio?

Michael W8CI:

Well, I think it's a stigma. It's a shame that in a way that it has that stigma, but it does. It's like the old guys' hobby and people kind of make fun of it a little bit. But at the same time

when a lot of the books I've been reading lately, there are excerpts and I like kind of science books, history science books. I've been really in Simon Winchester's books lately. I listened to audible books if I'm out in my property cutting grass or working or maybe instead of having a radio on, I listen to books.

But I've been absolutely fascinated that ham radio's getting spoken up a little bit more and in some higher places. But I think we just got to keep pushing on it and the stigma is there and how do we change that stigma? I think we change that stigma by understanding who we are and always taking the high path or high mind, much like the amateur radio operators of old did, they pride themselves on... They used to pride themselves on being excellent operators and their discussion was generally high minded and you're always going to have an element that is not.

But I love to tune around. If I'm in my shack and I'm doing something, sometimes I'll listen to fascinating conversations that people have that are of a much more technical nature. But that's my bent. Probably yours too.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I always felt like a voyeur listening to amateur radio conversation on the radio about whatever technical project that they were doing. I still do that and the fact that I can now Google it at the same time makes it even more rich.

Michael W8CI:

Boy, it does, Eric, but I think we live in a golden time for amateur radio. If you really think about it, this is the golden age at amateur radio. I mean look at, if you say the golden age, maybe it's the age of innovation would be better. But I don't want to make it sound old because golden age sounds like something that already happened.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Historically. Golden ages come to an abrupt end, so maybe we don't want to put the same golden age on it. But no, I think it's an amazing time to be interested in ham radio and be ham radio operator before we go, I'm sure that you may still have the Drake TR four, but what are you running now?

Michael W8CI:

I'm running a 7610 and I really, really like the 7610. I got a couple 7300s and I got one of them set up for a mobile operation. But primarily I have a 7610 and I have a couple of beams up, big JK antennas up at about 75 feet. I have just three amps right now. I only use one at a time. I have an ACOM, I think it's the 2100 A. I have to tune it, but it tunes so easy and it works so well. And then I have an Alpha 87A amp. And then sometimes if I'm operating for my RV, I have an ACOM 1010, which I have wired for 110 volts and it's really not that heavy and I use an inverted V with that. But yeah, that's pretty much what I run.

But I sit up on a hill and I have my tower in my antenna at the highest point. And I live in a rural area, a very low noise.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Nice and quiet.

Michael W8CI:

Very nice and quiet unless there's a lot of static in the air and I got a lot of little bells and whistles that go with it all. But that's basically what I have. I have other radios.

Eric 4Z1UG:

What is your favorite operating mode?

Michael W8CI:

I actually side band. 10 and 20 are my favorite bands. My antenna is a four Yagi on 20, but only two on 40. But I really get out and I can hear well. And it's interesting, sometimes I'll just point that beam, that beam's like a flashlight on that JK antenna. Very, very well built antenna. I don't want to be too much of a commercial but really like it, like the equipment. And anyway, it's neat to talk to small stations maybe way up in remote parts of Canada or way in Europe somewhere. And I don't get into a lot of nets. I do one net occasionally and that's called the big gun friendship net. And I sort of started during COVID and our friends Safe Alpha 71, Alpha Mike and Tim K3LR, they pretty much got that going. And that's right around 70, 7130 on Monday, Wednesdays and Fridays. And that's at 40 meter. So it's a very interesting net where everybody's welcome and doesn't matter if you have a lot of power or not, we just like talking with you.

I mean there's times that there's guys here, stations I can't. Very frustrating to me but I learn a lot from them, learn a lot listening to them and people from all over Eastern Europe and well Europe period. And then our friend Angel, a KP3R, he gets on there quite a bit too.

Eric 4Z1UG:

And Puerto Rico, right?

Michael W8CI:

Puerto Rico. Oh what a signal. That guy's got all that time. One of the very friendly guy and Jim, W3FET, I know you know him, Pennsylvania and he's Mr. Antenna and those guys are so positive. And to me I love talking to people that are positive and excited about life, excited about learning and then can just maybe take a slapping and keep on hamming.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I like that. Do you have advice that you'd give to new returning hams to the hobby?

Michael W8CI:

Get on the air, if you have questions, call me. Got a hold of a ham friend. And I even tell my buddies, we talk about this a lot in the club. Hey we've got to mentor, we've got to help just because somebody got their license, we got to help them. And we come over to the house, jump on, let's see what it's like to jump on a bigger station and then here's how I operate, how do you operate? And then coaching. I mean that's it. That's basically it. And then don't just get something and blindly ask us first because probably a lot of hands, I went out and bought stuff and I thought, well this looks good, that looks good, I'll get it. But it did not have the internet to go to and probably wasted a fair amount of money doing that until I really honed in on this is what I want to do, this is where I want to go and this is how I want to do it.

And so I tell that story to new hams too. We can't be afraid to ask for advice. I do. I mean I figure there's no such thing as a stupid question and I ask them anyway and I figure well they'll realize when I ask this question then I'm not a hot shot amateur radio operator. I don't quite understand this. Let me tell you another thing that I'm doing that you'll probably get a kick out of. You know when I got my extra class license. I have a very good, at least at that time, an excellent memory. And I am a professional musician. I also do that. I didn't mention that, within the tri-state area I play music in some fabulous musicians. One of them is a graduate of Julliard and the other one is a graduate down at Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. And so we play a lot of stuff that I basically compose and then we do a lot of performance stuff but that requires a tremendous amount of memorization.

So I spend a lot of time memorizing. I wake up at three in the morning, I'm memorized. The point of this is that I learned... I got my extra class license basically because I could memorize everything and remember I read it go "Okay, that's the answer." But did I understand it all? I don't know how well I understood it. So I recently purchase the ham test online, I think that's what it's called for extra class. And I am going back through it just to take out the rough edges. So that's where I'm at. And I've told some of my buddies and I thought they would maybe make fun of me, but general answer has been, "Wow, that's pretty good idea." I said, "If you're going to help people and you want to be a good AM operator, there are gaps in my learning I didn't get and I want to go back and really truly understand it." So I maybe opened myself up with that, but I'm pretty truthful, that's where I'm at with that.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Well look, I think anybody that took the extra class license exam and did the whole thing on Smith charts, unless you're designing antennas and stuff, you may not understand what a Smith chart is after you've taken the test and passed it.

Michael W8CI:

Yes, that's true.

Eric 4Z1UG:

So I think it's a license to learn. It opens a door for you to learn the art of amateur radio.

Michael W8CI:

Yeah, it does. And I hear conversations sometimes that I think on the radio or some of my friends are sitting around talking and I got to be kind of quiet because I don't fully understand it. So I learn, I listen and I ask questions but I am getting a lot of my gaps filled by retaking this class, as funny as that sounds, but that's what I'm doing. That's my learning process.

Eric 4Z1UG:

I think that sounds great. Michael, this was such a pleasure. I know that we first met at the last Dayton Hamvention and I was hanging out in the lobby of the Holiday Inn on Saturday afternoon and you came in and invited me to the awards banquet and that's where we met. I had such a delightful evening and I'm so glad that you agreed to come on the QSO Today podcast and talk a little bit about yourself. With that, I want to thank you so much and wish you 73.

Michael W8CI:

A couple final comments, Eric, I mentioned this before, but I certainly appreciate what you do and what you're doing for amateur radio and you can find the information about your event, I think today it should be up on our website. I wish you all the luck in the world and I think that we all have to support each other and whatever we're trying to do the betterment of amateur radio and I support what you're doing and I wish you all the success in the world with that. And I am truly honored that you would want to know about my life. So I wish you very, very good. Seven three.

Eric 4Z1UG:

Thank you. That concludes this episode of QSO Today. I hope that you enjoyed this QSO with Michael. Please be sure to check out this show notes that include links and information about the topics that we discussed. Go to www.qsotoday.com and put in W8CI in the search box at the top of the page. My thanks to Icom America for their continued support of the QSO Today Podcast. Please show your support of this fine sponsor by clicking on their link in the show notes pages. You may notice that some of the episodes are transcribed into written text. If you'd like to sponsor this or any of the other episodes into written texts, click on the transcribed button at the top of the show notes page.

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