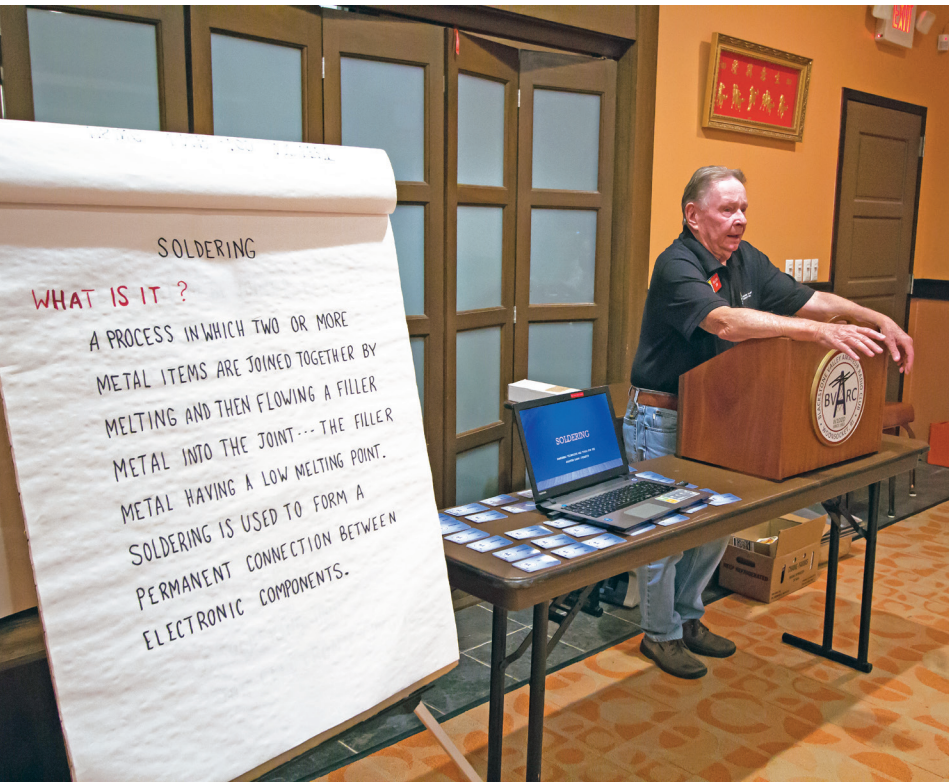


The Consortium



Jim Johnson, K1GND, speaks to the group about soldering techniques, beginning with a basic definition of what soldering is. [Judson Mitsock, W1JMZ, photo]

A proven, low-cost activity in which clubs provide useful Amateur Radio knowledge to new — and not so new — hams.

Bob Beaudet, W1YRC

New hams often get on the air by listening to one or more repeaters in their area. Because of this, their average level of ham radio knowledge is often largely defined by the other users of the repeater.

As I listened to my local repeaters over a considerable length of time, I noticed that many folks exchange ham radio information that isn't entirely correct, and often advise someone to use this or that antenna or power supply for an incorrect reason.

These hams simply don't know any better than what they learned on the repeater, because it's been the source of nearly all their knowledge. Still newer hams may overhear these conversations and accept that these are correct terms and manners of ham-speak. The issue expands, and soon we have a new generation of Technicians, Generals, and Amateur Extras who are misinformed.

Eight years ago, I decided that I had to do something. I'm an Amateur Extra who's been licensed for 64 years. I had the background, but I

wasn't sure what I could do that would make a difference.

What I did was reserve a meeting room at a local public library and put the word out on the local repeaters that I was offering a free class on antennas that everyone can build, along with DX operating techniques, secrets for breaking pileups, and lots more. This was not a club activity, only my personal effort. I scheduled it for a weekday evening and was pleasantly shocked to see nearly 20 folks from far and wide come to the first meeting.

Stick With the Basics

In that first session, I explained the common dipole, its feed point impedance, and the differences between coax and open-wire line. I made a 2-meter dipole in the class. Most people seemed to be getting at least some of what I was saying. Many questions came from the group and, surprisingly, there were just as many questions from General- and Amateur Extra-class hams as there were from Technicians.

The key to the session was to keep everything basic, and avoid discussing more advanced theory. The meeting lasted an hour and a half, and most of the group was eager to schedule another session. We met again a couple of weeks later.

That was the start, and it hasn't stopped after 8 years. Our program picked up the name "Consortium," possibly because it is an association of experienced hams formed for a particular purpose — the spread of basic radio knowledge.

The Hands-On Difference

You might be thinking that ARRL publishes many fine books that cover all of this. Why not just give out copies of *The ARRL Handbook*, the *Antenna Book*, the *Operating Manual*, and a few others, and tell folks to go home

and study? It's because, if left on their own, many new hams won't understand much or any of these books without someone to coach them. New hams don't understand the basic principles, or even the terms used. You must walk them through the mysteries that you understand — and possibly take for granted.

Consider offering some hands-on personal attention, to try to change prospects for our newer hams. Reaching out like this may effectively recruit new membership applications for your club, many from highly motivated and high-potential prospects — just the caliber of member you want.

The Importance of Keeping it Simple

As I said before, the material you teach must not go beyond the basics. This is very important. Try to remember that it has been many years since some of your participants have been in a classroom setting. Try to make it entertaining, to keep their attention. An hour to an hour and a half is about the maximum time that you can hope to hold the class's attention. Pushing further will generally be wasteful of everyone's time. Very interested folks will stay after the session ends to ask questions.

Another thing to consider is the fact that not all hams can comfortably speak to a group and break down the material into bite-size portions. Sometimes, the ham who has the greatest knowledge is least able to effectively teach it. The reverse is also true in that the person who wants to do the teaching may not understand the material him or herself. This makes teamwork necessary.

The Mentor Team that Hams Need

A retired production engineer, Jim Johnson, K1GND, and I conduct our Consortium monthly and we always outdraw our regular club meetings by

25 – 30% or more. Between us, we seem to have the right chemistry. My background isn't technical at all. I'm a retired staffing manager of a large electronics company. My college studies, more than 50 years ago, included management and finance, but no electronics. My technical knowledge was gained through years of ham radio experience. Jim and I combine our skills and give folks what they need. The system really works.

In the fall of 2017, we started our ninth year, meeting at a restaurant. Guests arrive an hour or so prior to the start of the class so they can enjoy a relaxing dinner with their friends. We do not charge for our classes, and they are open to anyone. Attendees pay for their own meals, and it's a nice night out for everyone. You can watch a short video that shows how the Consortium runs at www.w1ddd.org/consortium.html.

If you'd like to start your own Consortium, make a list of the basic areas in which your local hams have shown need of gaining knowledge. Typically, the list would include the basic types of antennas — dipoles, loops, verticals, etc. — and how they work. Save the more complex antennas for when the group is more comfortable with what a basic dipole does. At the early stage, you absolutely must keep all the material basic, or you'll lose the audience. Your list of beginning topics should also include proper tower and station grounding, and proper operating technique.



Jim Johnson, K1GND, conducts a Consortium session about types of feed lines, with simple drawings of each type. [Judson Mitscock, W1JMZ, photo]

Try to hold at least one session. Prepare your material well, and advertise it in places where your intended audience will hear about it. Run a good program and word about it will spread far and wide. Best wishes from our Consortium to yours.

ARRL Life Member and Amateur Extra-class licensee Bob Beudet, W1YRC, was licensed as a Novice in 1953 at the age of 14. He is an active ARRL Volunteer Examiner with 340 participations credited. He is DXCC Honor Roll #339, and has been New England delegate to the DX Advisory Committee (DXAC) since 2007. Bob is a Founding Charter Member of Blackstone Valley Amateur Radio Club, which was founded in 1954, and a member of the Diamond Club (Gold level), the Maxim Society, the A-1 Operator Club, and FISTS. He retired in 2000 after 42 years of service as a Staffing Manager for Raytheon in Massachusetts and Texas. Bob and his wife, Barbara, who passed away in 2010, have a son, a daughter, and three grandchildren. A Rhode Island native and lifelong resident, Bob has been ARRL Section Manager for Rhode Island since 2002. Bob can be reached at w1yrc@verizon.net.

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