

LINE OF SIGHT

A Message from the Editor

Doing a Better Job of Telling Our Stories

This past August 16–17, my wife Carol, W6CL, and I were among the nearly one hundred participants at the 2007 Global Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Conference (GAREC-07), which was held in Huntsville, Alabama during the run up to the Huntsville Hamfest. This was the third such conference, and the first one to be held in the U.S. (the other two were held in Europe). Among the participants were representatives from the IARU, the ARRL, Army MARS, American Red Cross, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, Department of Homeland Security, The Salvation Army, a Coast Guard auxiliary, as well as many appointees from the ARRL field organization. International participants came from Ireland, France, Bulgaria, Finland, The Netherlands, South Africa, Brazil, Canada, and Trinidad and Tobago. I was fascinated by the various stories told of amateur radio involvement in emergency communications.

This past September 28–29, I attended the Western Region NASA Space Grant Consortium conference, which was held in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Participants included directors of most of the state NASA space-grant consortia west of the Mississippi River, along with Louisiana. Also participating were affiliates of these various space-grant consortia, as well as NASA officials and faculty fellows affiliated with NASA.

I again was fascinated by stories told by the various participants of student involvement and student-driven projects taking place throughout the country. One such story was told by Mike Voglewede, a teacher at Northwood Public School, in Northwood, North Dakota. Northwood was in the news recently because of the August 26, 2007 devastating category four tornado that nearly destroyed the town. In the aftermath of the tornado, Mike spoke of the past and the future for his school. The immediate future for the school is it was so totally destroyed that it will have to be completely torn down and a new school built in its place.

What was not destroyed, however, is the spirit of several of the students who have participated in Northwood's after-school program. Here is their story, thanks to the efforts of Mike, his wife, and others in the school and the community.

It was about a half dozen years ago when Mike had the idea to bring robotics to the classroom—after school. Robotics is the study and building of robots for various tasks. What is important about learning robotics is

that robots increasingly are being used throughout industry to perform a variety of small and large tasks.

Robotics as a subject is one that both excites and educates youth. It excites youth because it is hands on. Young people build projects to accomplish tasks and in the process learn a number of skills, including creative thinking and working together in teams—in other words, learning how to cooperate with others in order to accomplish a task, something about which we adults sometimes need refresher lessons.

While robotics is an excellent teaching device, it is a non-traditional subject for many public K-12 schools that are constrained by the “no child left behind” mandate, with which most of today's public schools now must comply. Such was the case with Northwood Public School. Undaunted by this constraint, Mike and his friends decided to develop an after-school program centered on robotics. In time, the program almost took on a life of its own. The after-school program lasted from 3:30 in the afternoon to 9:30 at night. The parents got on board and began a rotational meal-serving program. The PTA went from a few in attendance to hundreds, and not all of them parents. Local industry got involved in the school, with businessmen and tradesmen becoming mentors for the students. At its peak, there were more Northwood students involved in the robotics after-school program than were on the football team.

Their hard work has paid off. Teaming with nearby Hatton Public School and entering multiple competitions, the robotics team has won many awards over the past several years.

While the tornado set back the program a bit, it has not stopped it nor kept outside sources from supporting it. For example, as demonstration of the faith it has in the robotics program, the North Dakota Space Grant Consortium awarded it a special \$5,000 grant to rebuild the robotics library.

While the robotics story is not directly related to amateur radio, one can easily see that amateur radio could become a part of it, or a similar program that incorporates amateur radio could be started in another school. Perhaps Mike's story might inspire you to start one in your local school.

What I found to be in common between these two conferences was that while participants in both conferences were very good at telling each other their stories, they seemed to be unable to tell their stories to others outside of their peers. For example, apart from my

mention of the GAREC-07 conference in my column in the November 2007 issue of *CQ* magazine and the article posted online at the ARRL's website (<http://www.arrl.org/news/stories/2007/08/24/102/>), very little publicity has been given to the many stories that have emerged from that conference. Furthermore, apart from its mention here, to date none of the other amateur radio media has covered the Western Region NASA Space Grant Consortium conference.

The tragedy of this lack of publicity is that both venues are sources of great stories concerning amateur radio or potential amateur radio involvement. Regarding GAREC-07, in the aftermath of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, one of the two emerging stories in amateur radio is the huge resources that its operators can commit to emergency communications—resources that heretofore have not been matched by the professionals at any level.

The other emerging story in amateur radio is education. Regarding amateur radio and education, the NASA Space Grant Consortium program is a very large source for such stories. You have already read stories of amateur radio involvement in the consortium in previous issues of *CQ VHF* magazine. One example is Professor Kevin Carr, KE7KVT's story “Through the Back Door: A Teacher's Journey into Amateur Radio,” which appeared in the Spring 2007 issue. Kevin's employer, George Fox University, is an affiliate of the Oregon Space Grant Consortium. Ironically, when I showed Kevin's article to Jack Higginbotham, OSGC's director, he was totally unaware of the national publicity that GFU had received via this magazine.

My point in this editorial is that we need to do a better job of telling our amateur-radio-related stories. No one else is going to do it for us—except perhaps your doggedly persistent editor. Yet even with my single-handed efforts, I still cannot discover or uncover all of your stories. In order to do so, I need your input—either by way of an article in *CQ VHF* magazine or a few paragraphs in my column in *CQ* magazine.

Therefore, if you have a story to tell, then please write it and get it to me. If you have a story lead, then send it to me and I will track it down. Please contact me via my e-mail address (n6cl@sbcglobal.net) with your story or story idea. I look forward to hearing from you in the very near future.

Until the next issue...

73 de Joe, N6CL