

Bit by the Bug at 10 Years Old

Beginning at the 2015 FIELD DAY radio event at ENSOR MUSEUM

By Jim Andera, K0NK

The ham radio bug bit 10-year-old Jim Krentzel while watching his grandfather, Bill Berokoff, KI7O, operate his station when Jim's family would make occasional trips to Oregon to visit his grandparents. This bug grew even bigger when Jim operated the GOTA station at the 2015 Field Day with the Santa Fe Trail ARC (SFTARC) near his home in Gardner, Kansas. Shortly after Field Day, with the goal of getting young Jim licensed, study was underway.

Any instructor will tell you that one of the greatest rewards that can be found in teaching is having an enthusiastic student. As Jim's Elmer, I can tell you his enthusiasm was about 40 dB over S9. Some might say that we did our study the old fashioned way; we walked through the lessons in the ARRL License Manual one chapter at a time --studying the concepts rather than jumping right into the questions and answers. While sitting at his kitchen table, modulation was explained as being much like a rider being placed on a horse. Operating procedures were demonstrated in my ham shack in front of the radios. A highlight of the learning experience for Jim was the excitement of soldering two wires together for the first time.



The efforts paid off. In October, Jim passed his Technician test and a few days later was assigned the callsign KE0GEY. With the enthusiastic support of his parents, Troy and Sarah Krentzel (both non-hams), a station went together at Jim's house. Troy welded up a special bracket to mount a VHF/UHF tri-band vertical to the peak of the roof. A rented lift allowed Jim and his dad to install a 53 ft end fed wire antenna for HF and 6m operation. SFTARC member Joe Krout, W0PWJ, had an extra HF/6m transceiver and I had extra 2m and 222 MHz mobiles radios to support the setup of a station.

Ever since observing the operation of the CW station at the SFTARC's 2015 Field Day, one of Jim's goals was to learn the Morse code. Considering that 10 meters was not doing very

well at supporting communications between Kansas and his grandfather in Oregon, we knew that learning CW would open up more HF bands for this Technician-class licensee to use that made learning the code even more attractive. Our CW Elmering sessions consisted of sending CW on 10 meters supported by voice communication on 22.2 MHz. Within two months, KE0GEY was able to make contact with KI7O on 15m CW during the day or 80m CW at night!

Perhaps it is the coordination that Jim has acquired through pitching baseball, or the rhythm he has learned in his music studies (he plays 3 instruments), but young Jim now sends better slow speed code with a straight key than his Elmer.



Five months after getting his Technician ticket, Jim was again taking an FCC exam, his time for the General class license. After attending upgrade classes taught by the SFTARC and some one on-one Elmering, not to mention taking practice tests, Jim, now 11 years old, passed the General exam on the first attempt. Talking to his grandfather and checking into VHF nets are among KE0GEY's favorite on the air

activities. Our code practice can now take the form of CW schedules with me when I travel to my cabin for the weekend or visit the Dayton Hamvention. And we continue our CW practice sessions using 10m and 22.2 MHz. Jim's off -the-air ham-radio activities include giving his 5th grade classes a presentation on the Morse code—

which was well received by students and teachers alike. Jim also treated the SFTARC to a repeat of his Morse code presentation to at one of our SFTARC Tech-Nite meetings.