

New Ham Kit

A Way for Clubs to Help Get New Hams on the Air

A New York radio association created a valuable tool for new operators.

Bryan Jackson, W2RBJ

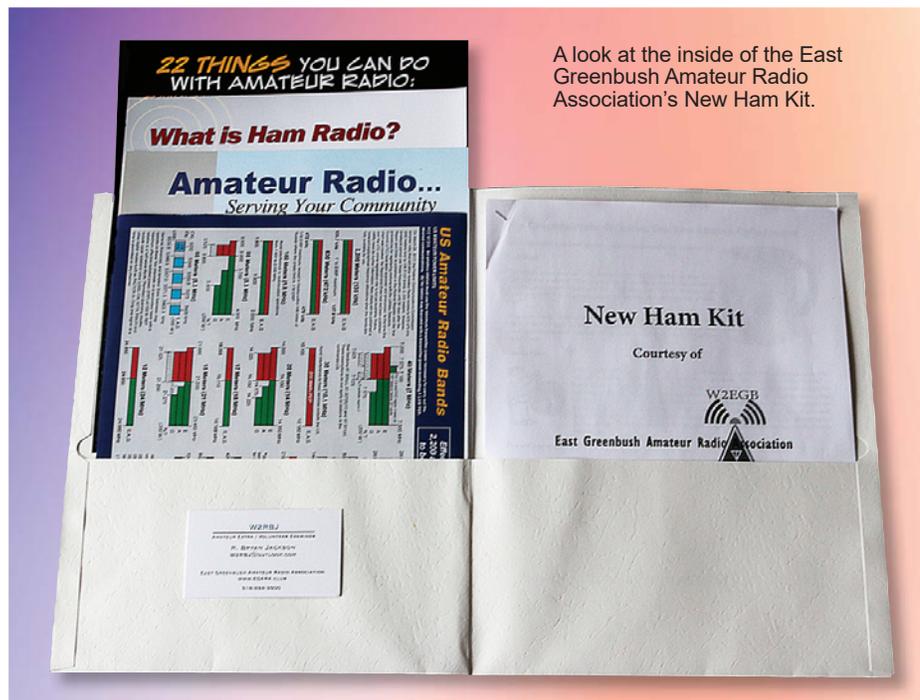
It's a common occurrence in amateur radio for test applicants to pass their licensing exams and never get on the air. Our club, the East Greenbush Amateur Radio Association (EGARA) located in New York's Capital District, found that the biggest challenge facing many new hams was simply where to start. To help with this, EGARA provides Technician-class licensees with a copy of our New Ham Kit. We've found it to be a valuable tool in getting newcomers on the air by offering easy-to-understand information on equipment basics, operating guidelines, and helpful tips.

Kit Details

First, our kit urges newly licensed hams to join an amateur radio club. In addition to including applications to join EGARA and ARRL, we offer a free

membership to EGARA for the first year. We point out that joining a club full of experienced hams (especially mentors) can provide the encouragement and guidance new operators need. As a result, our club has grown its membership and recruited younger operators vital to keeping our hobby alive.

Additionally, we provide new hams with an overview of the equipment they'll need to get on the air, including a brief review of entry-level handheld transceiver radios. We also encourage them to search the internet and YouTube to find resources and guidance available for new hams. We request their email address during their Volunteer Examiner (VE) session to add them to the mailing list for our monthly newsletter. This helps maintain our contact with these new hams and keeps our club in the forefront.



A look at the inside of the East Greenbush Amateur Radio Association's New Ham Kit.

In describing repeater basics, the kit includes an explanation of frequency offsets and CTCSS tones, how they work (with an illustration), as well as a detailed chart that lists offsets for each band. There's also a complete list of the frequencies and CTCSS tones for our local club repeaters.

Additionally, the kit includes information on how to make a call, upgrade your license, and other topics. While the kit doesn't address specific equipment controls, it does refer new hams to our club's website (www.egara.club), where they can find a wealth of resources and relevant information,

such as links to sites offering operating tips, repeater directories, ham radio equipment classifieds, and organizations such as ARRL, FCC, and SKYWARN.

Because our club maintains several repeaters, we include their frequencies and urge our new hams to use them. In particular, we emphasize not to be intimidated about pressing the push-to-talk (PTT) button, explaining that experienced hams are happy to help new operators.

We also include excellent resource materials from ARRL, many of which are free. Our kit usually runs about six pages of our own material, and three to four flyers provided by ARRL.

The information included in our kit was culled from EGARA members, ARRL, and reliable amateur radio sources.

Creating Your Own Kit

Like any project, producing your own kit will require a point person to manage it. If your club has a newsletter editor or webmaster, this might be the logical lead person. Creating the kit itself doesn't require anything more than a standard word processing program, although using a desktop publishing program such as Adobe InDesign or Microsoft Publisher can make the layout of text, graphics, and photos look more professional.

Adding visual elements can make concepts such as repeaters easier to understand. Helpful photos and graphics can be found online and are often royalty-free when they are used for non-commercial purposes. However, if you have club members who are adept at photography, you can create your own images.

Once you have a prototype kit assembled, have it reviewed for accuracy and content by several people — preferably by those who didn't work on it. You'll want to make sure that the information flows logically, is understandable, and that technical concepts are presented in a way that new operators can easily comprehend them. It's also a good idea to ask a non-ham to review your draft.

Once you're ready to go to press, remember that the presentation of your New Ham Kit is important too. Poorly reproduced copies and sloppy assembly of its contents will defeat your hard work and reflect negatively on your club. We usually only produce a dozen or so at a time, based on numbers from our past VE

New Ham Kit Contents

- ✓ Cover Sheet
- ✓ Congratulations On Getting Your New Amateur Radio License
 1. Overview of What's Next to Get On the Air
 2. Joining a Club
 3. Basic Equipment for Technicians
 4. Technician Operating Privileges
 5. Understanding the Band Chart
- ✓ Club Membership Application
- ✓ Getting On the Air
 1. Repeater Basics (with graphic)
 2. Offsets, CTCSS Tones
 3. How to Make a Call — Basic Call Script
 4. Talking to Other Stations, Dos and Don'ts
 5. Getting Experience
 6. Upgrading to a General License and Expanded HF Operation
- ✓ ARRL Information Flyers and Band Chart

sessions, using either an inkjet or laser printer. Office supply stores with printing centers are also an option.

We finish our kits by neatly placing the pieces in a pocket folder. These can be purchased for around 25 cents each, and some have a cutout for a business card. "New Ham Kit courtesy of the East Greenbush Amateur Radio Association" is neatly printed on a label and placed on the front of the folder. The completed kits are kept with our VE exam materials and brought to each testing session.

Finally, our cost per kit runs under a dollar. This small investment has allowed us to gain and retain a dozen or so new members over the past couple of years since we began handing out our New Ham Kit. Hopefully your club will enjoy similar results.

Bryan Jackson, W2RBJ, holds an Amateur Extra-class license, is an ARRL sanctioned Volunteer Examiner, and serves as President of the East Greenbush Amateur Radio Association. He is a former Press Officer to two New York governors and previously served as State Capitol Correspondent for NBC, WNYT-TV, and WOR Radio. From 1991 to 1996, he built, owned, and managed WCDA-FM in Albany, New York. Today, he is semi-retired, but enjoys working as a substitute teacher and encouraging his students to explore amateur radio. Bryan can be reached at w2rbj@outlook.com.

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