Lee Chambers, KI7SS, and Phil Cornell, W7PLC

Under a “stay home” order due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Washington state’s Olympia Amateur Radio Society (OARS) members were feeling the impacts of isolation, missing the camaraderie of meetings, programs, and much more. Forced to implement a solution, we evaluated the cost and benefits of internet video conferencing programs available, settling on Zoom video conferencing software. It fit our budget and participant needs, and it works on any platform — PC, Android, iPhone, or iPad.

Zoom Features

Think of Zoom as a video net, complete with a Net Control Station in the form of the host, check-ins as your image on everyone’s screen, and message traffic as the chat function and screen sharing. Zoom has remarkably easy integration with any program on the presenter/host’s laptop, which allows for PowerPoint presentations that can be viewed by all participants. During the live video, participants can comment, ask questions, or transfer files using the chat function. There are even breakout Zoom Rooms where subgroups can meet and report back.

Setting It Up

Members have the option to join a meeting with audio only, video only, or a full audio/video connection. A device with a camera, a microphone, and an internet connection are the bare minimum requirements. All modern laptop computers and smartphones have these features built in, making Zoom a logical answer to the feeling of social isolation created by the pandemic.

With the purchase of a Zoom license, which can be purchased on a monthly or yearly basis, we were given the ability to host meetings with up to 100 participants. Higher priced plans are available for larger groups. To participate in any online meeting, the host must distribute their Zoom-assigned 9- or 10-digit ID number.

Typical OARS Zoom meeting on March 25, 2020. [Phil Cornell, W7PLC, photo]
First licensed in 1959, Lee Chambers, KI7SS, is a former Navy A6A radar technician. He retired from an electronics career, is the past president of the Olympia Amateur Radio Society, and is an ARES member. He is the communications coordinator for several local events, has taught many license classes, and has moderated the Olympia OARS Info Exchange Net for many years.

First licensed in 1978, Phil Cornell, W7PLC, has been a member of OARS since 1982. He is in AEC-Training for Thurston County ARES. He enjoys DXing, contesting, participating in nets, and antenna building.

**Online CW Class for Children and Teens**

Robb Zarges, K2MZ

Our world changed drastically in March with strict COVID-19 restrictions. For children, that change took the form of school from home. With 30 years of working with teens and children, I was inspired to offer Morse code classes for children and teens through the Long Island CW Club.

Within 2 weeks of spreading the word through emails to club members and Facebook, Twitter, and QRZ.com posts, we had 57 kids from 31 states and four countries. These results far exceeded my expectations.

I split the material into three Zoom classes — kindergarten to third grade, fourth and fifth grades, and sixth to 12th grades. We meet every day. Three weeks into our classes, we scheduled a fourth class to account for 15 additional students.

Within a month and a half, all the children had learned all 40 characters of CW, learned how to send and receive a CQ, and can use their made up call signs to send the first stage of the CW contact protocol. We have 5-year-olds that are just learning to read that can copy and send short messages to classmates. We have teenage girls meeting in Zoom Rooms to practice on their own. We’ve had kids make keys out of LEGO, while others build oscillator kits. One student graduate from the beginner class posts a CW Joke of the Day on our class Facebook page. Additionally, because the class requires a parent to be within earshot, we’ve had parents start learning CW along with their children.

We’ve had generous donations of build kits, and 20 straight keys. With 75 children (60% girls) enrolled to date, we are planning to offer classes year-round, with the next set scheduled for mid-May. Enrollment has already begun with 30 children in the intermediate class and 12 children in the beginner classes. We plan to offer a summer Technician-class license exam prep class, too.