

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hawthorne Valley School Students Participate in Week-Long International HAM Radio Contest

Ghent, NY – February 15, 2016: More than 300 multi-colored push pins mark the locations on a map of North America where Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School student HAM radio operators made contact throughout the week of February 8-12, during an international *School Club Round-Up* HAM radio contest held by ARRL – the National Association for Amateur Radio. According to ARRL’s website, the objective of the contest is to exchange QSO* information with club stations that are part of an elementary, middle, high school or college. Non-school clubs and individuals are also encouraged to participate. Award certificates will be issued in several categories: Schools, Non-School Clubs, and Individuals.

A cluster of the brightly-colored pins are stuck in the map’s far eastern margin, and are marked with the names of international locations: Dublin, Ireland; Paris, France; Northern Germany; Wales; England; Belgium; Norway; Spain; Italy; Ukraine; and Croatia. High school Junior Sean Madey, who is one of three members of Hawthorne Valley’s team, explains that these are the farthest contacts the team made during the contest (outside of North America). Among the contacts are an aeronautical radio station (a HAM radio operator in an airplane), and a nautical station (a HAM operator on a boat). The team’s other members are Sean’s younger brother, Alexander Madey, and their cousin William Pilgrim, both of whom are in 8th grade.

Alexander Madey has his Technician’s Class HAM radio operator’s license and with that has been assigned a call sign by the FCC (Federal Communications Commission). Sean Madey and William Pilgrim have each earned the next level of licensing, General’s Class, which allows the operator access to more frequencies. There is one final licensing class that can be achieved, Extra Class, which provides all-frequency access. It used to be that HAM radio operators had to learn Morse Code in order to earn their license, but Sean pointed out that this is no longer a requirement; although, he did say that learning Morse Code is on his “bucket list.”

The students set up their station, made from components gleaned from “a variety of places,” in the school lobby and have attracted the interest and attention of their classmates throughout the week. So much so that the team is considering starting an amateur radio club at school.

The students monitored the station intermittently throughout the day, during lunch hours and after school until about 5 p.m., when, according to Sean, the atmospheric conditions deteriorate and make it difficult to reach other operators. The rules of the contest dictate that when a contact is made, both the sender and the receiver get a point, so the students keep the conversations short, identifying themselves, finding out the names and locations of the party they’ve contacted, and sharing some technical details like a *strength of signal report*. Contest rules also limit station operation to no more than 6 hours in a 24-hour period, and a maximum of 24 hours of the 107-hour event.

At the conclusion of the contest period on Friday afternoon, the team had made more than 300 contacts. A former HAM radio operator himself, the Madey's grandfather Jules Madey, served as the team's mentor and helped them set up their equipment and fashioned an antennae that ran through the school's lobby to the outdoors, reaching up into a nearby tree. Sean and his grandfather are both members of the Rip Van Winkle Amateur Radio Society, which serves Columbia and Greene counties.

Why in this day and age, would someone pursue their amateur radio license? Sean was quick to point out that apart from it being a fun hobby, there are still practical uses for HAM radio. The equipment is completely 'off the grid' technology – it doesn't need the internet, or electricity and can run using just battery power – it is truly wireless. So in situations of natural disaster, or when trying to reach very remote locations like Antarctica, HAM radio still has practical applications in today's world. Sean mentioned that locally, HAM radio operators often help organizers at community sporting events, like 5K runs, where they need to know what's happening on course. HAM radio operators often volunteer to set up a station to assist with this type of monitoring – a win-win for both the organizers and operators as the organizers get free event monitoring, and the operators get lots of practice.

*Note: According to Wikipedia, an amateur radio contact, more commonly referred to as simply a "contact", is an exchange of information between two amateur radio stations. The exchange usually consists of an initial call, a response by another amateur radio operator at an amateur radio station, and possibly a signal report. A contact is often referred to by the Q code QSO. It is often limited to just a minimal exchange of such station IDs. Stations who have made a contact are said to have *worked* each other.

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Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School is a pre-K through grade 12 school situated on a 500-acre Biodynamic farm in New York's Hudson Valley. Hawthorne Valley's integrative Waldorf curriculum is designed to create a healthy and balanced learning environment where children build living connections to the natural world while cultivating social responsibility, personal excellence, and the practical capacities to meet the challenges of the future. The school is part of Hawthorne Valley Association, a diverse nonprofit in central Columbia County, NY. Dedicated to social and cultural renewal through the integration of education, agriculture, and the arts, Hawthorne Valley Association's campus includes the Waldorf school; a working Biodynamic farm; on-farm education programs; a full-line natural foods store; social, ecological, and cultural research groups; teacher training programs; and more. For additional information, please visit www.hawthornevalleyassociation.org.

Photograph (attached); L to R: William Pilgrim, Alexander Madey, and Sean Madey at their HAM radio station set up in Hawthorne Valley Waldorf School's lobby the week of February 8-12.

CONTACT: Heather Gibbons
Director of Marketing and Communications
Hawthorne Valley Association
518.672.4465 x 222
hgibbons@hawthornevalleyassociation.org
www.hawthornevalleyassociation.org

