

ARC-SHORTS

The Newsletter of the Alexandria Radio Club May 2024

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Jason Palma, WA6MPR, (blue hat) coaches (l-r) Corey Law, KN4YZY, Skip Dronen, KQ4QKO, and Louis Mingo, KO4QVB, at the club POTA training session, April 13. Story below.

Dinner-Meeting This Month

Meeting will be held on Friday, May 10, at the Glory Days Grill, 3141 Duke Street, Alexandria.

Dinner begins at 6, Meeting at 7.

President's Corner

Sean (K4KBK)

reetings and Salutations! We're just a little more than a month out from Field Day so it's time to review what you are bringing to the party. If you are bringing new or new-to-you equipment, recommend you test the setup to ensure you are getting the results you need. Sandy (KQ4DNE), our Field Day Chair, has one more field exercise scheduled in early June where you can set up your gear and ensure that it is operating as you expect, or get help from others if you need it.

Speaking of getting on the air, **Bryan** (WD4ADF) has done an awesome job of training and scheduling **net control operators** for our Wed/Thurs night nets, but we need some more operators to help run the show. Don't let Jeff and Ian have all the fun! In general, the net only lasts for 30 minutes each night so the investment in time it minimal. Mic shy? Not sure if you have the equipment to do the job? Contact Bryan to get the process rolling. You won't be disappointed!

Hamvention is only a week away but there's still time to get those shopping lists together and join in on this adventure. I believe we have a dozen or so going from the Club but can always welcome more. If you need help with logistics, contact me and I'll help get you set up.

Our monthly meeting for May is scheduled for **This FRIDAY AT GLORY DAYS GRILL FROM 6-10PM**. The business portion of this meeting will be brief and the primary focus will be socializing. Please plan to be there and if you have family, friends, and neighbors who may be interested in amateur radio, bring them along!

Lastly, we're still looking for a few volunteers to assist with some administrative projects like fleshing out our club history and building an inventory management system that will allow us to forecast our equipment needs with projected costs out through a five-year window. Boring? Potentially, but the process will pay big dividends going forward. Operating with an annual execution year budget is OK for balancing our accounts but is no help in looking at the big picture in 2029–30. This is our club and we should all strive to be active participants. OK, off my soapbox now!

Look forward to seeing you all on Friday night for a burger, frosty beverage, and some light-hearted discussion. Also hope to hear more of you on the air!

73, Sean, K4KBK

Member News

Congratulations to . . .

...those who passed license exams at our testing session, May 7.

Nine candidates sat for amateur radio exams and all nine candidates passed.

Technician Class: Wade Carroll, Larry Corcoran, Jeremy Furtney, Irina

Geiman, Philip Jones, Jaime Saunders, Claire Walker.

General Class: Ninoslav Zahrastnik

Amateur Extra Class: Aaron Kahn (K6HLC)

The Alexandria Radio Club volunteer examiners conducting the exam session were: Gary Sessums (KC5QCN), Richard Morani (KW4UJ), Robert Crumley (KO4ZIK), and Ian Keith (N8IK)



Club POTA Outing

By Jason Palma, WA6MPR

ast month, Sandy Kenyon, KQ4DNE, approached a few club members about having some pre-Field Day Parks on the Air (POTA) activations at a local parks. The desire is to get club members familiar with portable operations and to have a good time playing radio. So, with that direction we settled on conducting a club activation at Belle Haven Park along the George Washington Memorial Parkway on the 13th of April. I volunteered to conduct the first event and bring all of the required gear to have a successful outing. Fortunately, the weather cooperated with a



sunny, albeit windy, day. I'll get to the details of the activation later. Let's go over the ins and outs of the POTA program and how to prepare for your first activation.

How POTA Works

In the POTA program there are activators and hunters. Activators are the hams that go out to the park, set up a station, and attempt to make contacts with those who are hunting for the activators. Hunters are those hams looking to make contact with an activator. As an activator, the only requirement is to have your station within the boundaries of a POTA entity. The entity can be a state or national park, wildlife refuge, management area, trail, or even a building. Ford's Theater has nine activations! The US has over 11,000 park entities with thousands more around the world. POTA's success relies on having both activators and hunters. According to the parksontheair.com site, there are over 500,000 unique call signs/participants in POTA. You will need to figure out what works best for you. Do you enjoy getting outside and operating portable or driving somewhere and operating mobile? Then you might be interested in activating parks. Do you have a top-notch ham shack that you enjoy using or have mobility issues? Then being a hunter might be up your alley. Keep in mind that you can be an activator one day and a hunter the next. I've actually completed a park activation by just hunting other stations on the POTA spots page (explained below). It is up to you to find out what works for your situation.

Your Plan, Your Preparation, Your Equipment

When deciding on a POTA activation location, there are three major areas I think about before heading out the door. First, I think about the **personal aspects** about the location:

Weather: If it is sunny, I may need a tent or shady area, sunscreen, hat, or lots of water. If it is raining, I may need a tent or just decide to activate from my vehicle.

Physiological: If the park is busy, I may need access to a restroom. If it is in the middle of nowhere, I may have more options.

Physical: Will I need to bring a table and chair or just use a park picnic table? Is your truck tailgate an option? Will you need to hike miles to get to the location or just drive up and park? Will I operate from my bicycle or other device? How long can I go on calling CQ POTA? Each answer will dictate the duration and quality of the activation.

Second, I think about the **location requirements**:

Type of park: If the park is in a popular area, you may need to find a quiet portion of the park to keep foot traffic low. If it is historic, you might need to use only self-supporting antennas—no stakes. The park may have restrictions on using the trees as antenna supports. Check park websites for rules. Is the park in a tourist area, like the Mall in DC? You may need to request a permit before activating in the downtown DC core. First amendment permits are free, but

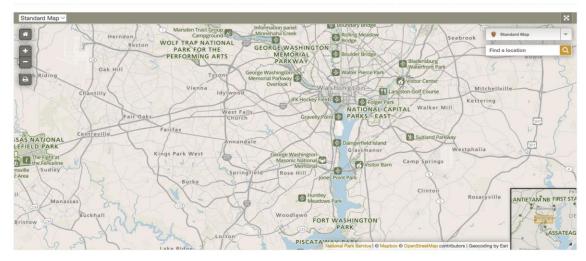


you'll need to apply early and coordinate with the park. In my experience, going early and staying out of the way is a good rule for popular parks. In some cases, you can operate mobile from the street—Pennsylvania Ave is a National Historic Park. (Belle Haven area shown left.)

Park boundaries: For POTA, the operator and the station must be inside the boundary of the park. If it is a trail or river, the station should be within 100 feet of the trail or body

of water. Most state and federal parks have websites with maps of the park that will help you pinpoint the perfect location to set up. The POTA.app site has maps locating the general area of the park, but not specific boundaries. (The DC-MD-NOVA area shown on next page.) It is up to the operator to meet the spirit and intent of POTA to operate within the park boundaries, obey park rules, leave no trace, and have some fun outside.

Maps



George Washington Memorial Parkway

Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve

Fort Hunt Park

Jones Point Park

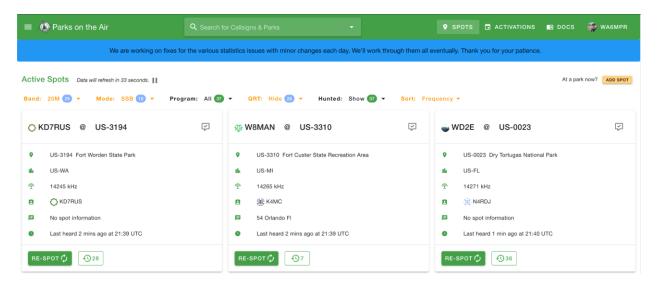
Mount Vernon Trai

Potomac Heritage Trail (Section administered by the George Washington Memorial Parkway

Potomac Heritage Trail (Entire trail)

Multi-entity locations: Are you trying to activate a multi-entity location? In POTA parlance we call these two-fers, three-fers, four-fers...you get the point. During our recent club event we activated a seven-fer. There were seven different park entities which overlapped at that location. The DMV has a huge concentration of multi-park entities. Hunters love finding an activator with multiple parks as they get credit for each park with only one contact.

Spotting & connectivity: POTA is enhanced by using the spotting network on the POTA.app site (illustrated on next page). Sometimes you can spot yourself on your cellphone and sometimes you can't. If you can't, just find a frequency and start calling CQ POTA. Someone will find you and most POTA hunters are happy to spot you. During most of my activations, I get spotted many times. If you plan to operate digital you can use JS8 Call to spot yourself on the POTA site. If you use CW, FT8, or FT4 the reverse beacon network will automatically spot you. There are some nuances to all of this, so think ahead and be ready for your spotting needs.



Lastly, I focus on the equipment required to have a successful outing:

Station size: The park layout and type of planned activation will drive your station type. Will you need a small wagon to haul your gear to the right spot? Carrying a table, chair, tent, radio, antenna, anchoring methods, coax, batteries, water, laptop, pencils, paper, etc. can get quite heavy. Maybe your whole setup will fit in a backpack? Think about what works for you.

Modes & Bands: Determine what modes you would like to use. Phone and digital? CW only? Your choice of modes will drive many other equipment requirements. Figure out what bands you'd like to operate. 80/75m will drive very different antenna requirements than 2m. Consider keeping digital modes like FT8 or FT4 in your tool box. I've had many occasions where the conditions for Phone contacts were poor and I couldn't get the minimum 10 contacts to complete the activation. Switching to FT8 can save the day. If you are blessed with CW skills, POTA is a great way to rack up contacts. The POTA spots page is usually filled with CW activators. Most activations occur on 40m and 20m within the General portion of the band. That doesn't mean hams don't use many other bands, it is just where most of the POTA activity resides. Extra Class operators sometimes start their activations in the Extra portion of the band as a warmup before moving to the more crowded General portion of the band. Some POTA activators lament contest/QSO Party weekends, but not me. A contact is a contact and you don't even need to spot yourself if there is a contest going on. Just spin the dial and make the contact.

Radios: There are many different radios that work for POTA. Consider whether you will be operating a 100w or something less. HF only? Will you try VHF? Is satellite in the mix? Sometimes I use my FT-991A when I have a large setup or I'll use my FT-891 if I want to save weight. When I travel for work, I typically bring a QRP radio like an FX-4CR or TX500. If you plan to operate digital, you

may need a sound card and cables (think Digirig or Signalink). Don't forget a power cable!

Antennas: There are endless opinions on the best antenna for portable ops. Do you go with a resonant or non-resonant setup? Should I use a homebrew or commercial? Whether you decide to go with a light EFHW, random wire vertical, screwdriver, ham sticks, Buddipoles, or the reliable wire dipole, always bring two options. My activations have been saved many times by having a backup antenna. Sometimes you just can't get the same type of ground at a different location and your planned vertical with counterpoise wires just won't get below 3:1. Remember, if you have a mobile setup, that can be your backup. With POTA antenna tuning, don't let perfect be the enemy of good enough. Don't go chasing a perfect SWR and forego making contacts.

Tuner/Matching Unit: Using non-resonant antennas can drive the use of a tuner/matching unit. Keep that in mind if you are concerned about how much gear you will need to bring.

Power: Your power requirements will depend on the duration of the activation, operating mode, radio, computer, temperature, and other power vampires. I'm a huge fan of LiFePo batteries for POTA. They come in a myriad of sizes. You can make your own (ask Ryan, KO4EBY). And they last. If you have good sun, you can use solar to keep your batteries topped up.

Computers & Logging: If you plan to use digital, then a computer will be part of your plan. Make sure you think about all the connections and settings before you get to the park. I use the notepad app extensively on my iPhone and iPad to store all my different radio settings for WSJT-X. I use the Books app to store every radio manual for every radio I own. No matter what radio I decide to use, I'll have the manual on my phone. For logging, there are many options. Sometimes my first choice is just a pencil and paper. Find a way to log time, call sign, frequency, RST both ways, and location and you are good to go. For digital logging, I prefer to use the HAMRS app, as it has a POTA setting. It connects to the POTA app site and pulls the spots page information. Always make sure you have paper and pencil as your back up plan.

Feedline & Connectors: This is an area where I overpack a bit. I usually carry 50 feet of RG-58 with a ferrite ring at one end with BNC connections. I also bring a 25-foot length of RG-58 with BNC connections and a BNC connector to join them. These lengths cover most of my needs and fit nicely in a back pack. Having a ferrite ring at the end closest to the radio allows you to use that length of coax as a part of the antenna system without getting the common mode current back in the radio. I also carry a bag of every type of conversion

connector you can imagine. SO-239, SMA, N type, and BNC to everything else. Trust me you will need them.

Our POTA Day

Now that we've covered the basics, let's get back to our club event. I decided to set up three separate stations to demonstrate the various ways a ham can participate in POTA as an activator. The **first station** (top right) was a larger setup with a portable table and camp chair, a Yaesu FT-991A, Packtenna EFHW antenna in an inverted vee setup



on an 18ft Sotabeams mast, 20 amp hour LiFePo Bienno battery being fed with a Powerwerx portable solar panel, and a laptop for logging.

The **second station** (middle right) used a smaller camp table and chair, Yaesu FT-891, ATAS-120 screwdriver antenna on a Buddiepole mast with lots of counterpoise wires, and a small tablet computer.

The **third station** (bottom right) was the backpack portable station. It had a compact camp table and small seat, FX-4CR radio, Radioactive Antennas Mr. Big Stick 2, Wolf River Coil whip, and a mAT-10 antenna tuner.

Before we started our club activation, we discussed many of the topics listed above and covered all the considerations when picking a location for setup. After





spending a good 30-45 minutes of chatting, we decided to get to work. I started the activation on 40m phone in the General portion of the band. 40m is pretty good for guaranteed contacts on the East coast. After getting a few contacts, Skip, KQ4QKO, took the mic to get some contacts. I talked him through the flow and logged his contacts. Each POTA operator has a flow and it is always good to listen to the activator and their pacing before making a contact. Louie, KO4QVB, also jumped in to get some contacts. By the time we were done we had 23 contacts and had activated 7 different parks.

After a lot more chatting about gear and the POTA process, it was time to call it a day. After packing up and heading home, the next step was to log the event on the POTA.app site. Our club has an account, so if you decide to hold a W4HFH club outing you can either send one of the club members with the login information your log, or request the login information. Logs are uploaded in ADIF format with a specific naming convention. For example, the club file was named W4HFH@US-4564-041324.adi. This lists the call sign, park number and date. Because this location had seven park entities, I had to upload seven different logs. My technique is to open the original file in Excel and use find & replace on the park name and save a new file for each park number. Just make sure to append the file with .adi at the end. The onus is on the activator to upload the logs, as all of the hunters want their credit! Uploading is easy to do on the site. Just drag and drop all the files and the system will begin the process.

The club POTA outing was loads of fun and a great learning event for everyone. I hope to attend more of these types of events in the future and see more members come out and learn from each other. POTA on!

73, Jason, WA6MPR

Editor's Note: In addition to Jason, those attending the event were: Sandy Kenyon, KQ4DNE, Jack Parker, W4JJ, Sean Gallagher, K4KBK, Jan Maas, KB2LRX, Floyd Crawford, K4BWI, Corey Law, KN4YZY, Skip Dronen, KQ4QKO, Louis Mingo, KO4QVB, Andy Davnie-Easton, KI4THF, Bjorn Jernudd, KC3AOO, Joe Brown (no call). Several non-hams stopped by to ask what was going on.

The next POTA Outing and Training Session will take place on Saturday, June 1, at Belle Haven Park.



Special Comment

It's all about the community

By Kenneth R. van Wyk (K0RVW)

ere's to radio communities! DMR calls them "Talkgroups;" D-STAR calls them "Reflectors;" Echolink calls them "Conferences." And, of course, we all enjoy the venerable "Nets." The results are similar, but the technologies are different. We have different operating modes, frequency bands, and so forth.

Our tech world is rich in choices. But it seems we often tend to select the tech first and the community second, and that's a shame, if you ask me. Wouldn't it be nice if we could spot a community we like and join it, anywhere, no matter what technology they used?

Fortunately, there seems to be hope for some change.

In the past few years, we've started seeing advances in cross mode reflectors. These allow groups to exist among heterogeneous and often incompatible modes by acting as a digital "babelfish" to bridge multiple modes together. This allows the operators to build a community first, and plug in the technologies they care to second.

A bit of background is called for here.

I've been using DMR for a couple years now. I've used it on both Brandmeister and TGIF systems. (These are overarching DMR controllers that manage their respective traffic, including talkgroups.) Brandmeister is the "big kid on the block," but there are others that offer compelling and competing alternatives.

As a very (!) general rule, I found most of the Brandmeister talkgroups to be organized by geographic region, whereas the TGIF talkgroups are largely organized by topic. (Yes, there are many exceptions and overlaps here.) For my part, I happened to find a couple of topic-focused groups on TGIF I liked a lot, so I primarily set up my gear for TGIF.

But, how did I go to TGIF if my club's repeater uses DMRVA, Brandmeister, or some other? The answer is: Hotspots. A hotspot enables you to run your own private, but short range, repeater. You prefer TGIF, no problem. D-STAR is your thing, go for it. You like to change modes like you change socks? All of

these things are achievable. Heck, they're not very expensive, so you can run a few of them for your different preferences. Then, just change frequencies and you can get to whichever hotspot you care to.

There are inexpensive hotspots based on the Raspberry Pi single board computer, as well as numerous others like the Openspot and Clearnode. Some of these offer cross-mode translation to one degree or another, which is helpful. However, architecturally speaking, putting the cross-mode translation out at the "client" end (at your QTH) only solves the multi-mode issue for you, not for other users in the communities you're talking with.

I should add a quick mention of my favorite hotspot here: Clearnode. It's not the cheapest on the market, but it runs on a relatively fast Raspberry Pi 4 computer, it can connect to AllStarLink and EchoLink, as well as numerous digital modes. And, what really distinguishes it from the others out there, the local interface is over FM, not digital. This enables me to use even a cheap Chinese radio to connect to it.

But, I digress... There is clearly a myriad of choices and technologies, but in the interest of putting the community first and the technology second, enter multiprotocol gateway servers (XLX). (See

 $\frac{https://www.qsl.net/kb9mwr/projects/dv/multi/XLX\%20Multiprotocol\%20Ham}{Radio.pdf})$

These appeared back in 2016 or so, and were designed to address the sort of issues I've described here.

An XLX supports one or more modes of operation and it provides a translation bridge between them. There is open-source software (https://github.com/LX3JL/xlxd) for running one. The best part is that you're not tied to any single technology. You can create a community and plug in the technologies you wish to support in your community.

One such XLX group I've found to be interesting is WWChat (World wide chat)—see http://wwchat.us. It supports multiple modes, although they've at least temporarily disabled the D-STAR bridge. It can be accessed from DMR as TGIF talkgroup 31226, EchoLink node KE8ANE-R, or AllStarLink node number 507352. The AllStar and Echolink connectivity allows many non-digital users to connect in as well. You can even get a free or inexpensive EchoLink/AllStar client on your smart phone to connect in. I like using RepeaterPhone on my iPhone, but there are others.

In my opinion, XLXes offer a lot of promise and I'm enthusiastic about their future. On the other hand, they've existed since 2016 and have not exactly exploded in popularity either. But, as with all such things in amateur radio, they'll either succeed or fade away. I hope for the former.

My advice is to find a community of like-minded friends using an XLX and try connecting in. Yes, there'll be plenty of trial and error. And yes, there are still thousands of groups on Brandmeister, et. al. Explore and find a group or a few groups that suit you. Many run their own weekly nets and such.

Dive in and explore. Isn't that what appeals to us most about our hobby, after all? —**Ken** (**K0RVW**)



Activities and Events

Hamfests:

 May 17-19, Hamvention 2024, Dayton, OH. https://hamvention.org/



 June 1, Ole Virginia Hams Tailgate, Manassas, VA. https://w4ovh.net/tailgate/

Contests:

- May 18-19, Arkansas QSO Party. www.arkqp.com
- June 1-2, Kentucky QSO Party. http://www.kyqsoparty.org/rules
- June 1-2, AARL Digital Contest. https://contests.arrl.org/ContestRules/Digital-Rules.pdf
- June 8-10, VHF Contest.
 https://contests.arrl.org/ContestRules/JanJunSep-VHF-Rules.pdf

 (Selected from ARRL Contest Calendar www.arrl.org/contest-calendar)

Special Events:

- May 11, Commemorating Armed Forces Day, San Diego, CA, USS Midway Museum Ship. www.qrz.com/db/ni6iw
- May 11, Jamestown Landing Day Event, Williamsburg, VA, Williamsburg Area ARC. https://www.k4rc.net/events/special-event-stations/

- May 12-18, National Police Week, to Honor our Fallen Heros, Fredericksburg, VA. https://www.qrz.com/db/K3FBI
- May 18, National Maritime Day, Nuclear Ship Savannah ARC, Baltimore, MD. www.qrz.com/db/k3s

(Selected from ARRL Special Event Page <u>www.arrl.org/special-event-stations</u>)

Alexandria Radio Club Date Book

Coming Events

May 17-19: Hamvention, Dayton, OH

June 1: POTA Outing/Training, Belle Haven Park, Alexandria

June 2: Alexandria's D-Day Commemoration, 1-4 p.m., Market Square (ARC

Exhibition Table)

June 22-23: Field Day, Chinquapin Park

October 27: Marine Corps Marathon

Next Meeting

Will be held on Friday, May 10, at the Glory Days Grill, 3141 Duke Street, Alexandria. Dinner begins at 6 p.m., meeting at 7.

Last Meeting

Date: April 12, 2024 Time: 1900 hours

Location: Zoom and In-Person at APD Community Room, Wheeler Lane

Highlights of the meeting included:

• Discussion about data- and information-sharing programs being considered for club communication. We still need to research the amount and age of club equipment, who has it, and where it is stored. Also, 50 years of paper

- records need to be catalogued and preserved, both electronically (in a searchable format) and physically. Volunteers needed to help with this.
- Sandy, KQ4DNE, outlined plans for Field Day 2024, to be held June 22-23, at Chinquapin Park. Details will be presented at May and June meetings.
- Sandy announced dates for POTA training, for fun, and as a practice for Field Day. First date will be April 13.

Attendance (21)

Name	Call Sign	Name	Call Sign	Name	Call Sign
Sandy	KQ4DNE	Richard	KW4UJ	Bryan	WD4ADF
Erik	KI4BXU	Bob	KO4ZIK	Louis	KO4QVB
Ryan	KO4EBY	Jan	KB2LRX	Andrew	KI4THF
Ted	W9TCE	Pete	N2KFA	Jack	KE7VOU
Jason	WA6MPR	Jack	W4JJ	Joe	KT3I
Bjorn	KC3AOO	Corey	KN4YZY	Skip	KQ4QKO
Sean	K4KBK				
Jay	KV3W				
Ian	N8IK				

PLEASE USE OUR REPEATERS

Club Repeaters: 147.315+ (PL 107.2), 444.6+ (PL107.2), 224.82– (PL107.2), 53.130– (PL107.2) 927.600 (-25Mhz, PL107.2), and 1282.600– (PL 107.2), DSTAR 145.380Mhz, 442.060+, and 1284.600–; DMR IS UP AND RUNNING 442.4125 +5Mhz Color Code 1.

Alexandria Radio Club mailing list

Home: http://mailman.qth.net/mailman/listinfo/alexandriaradioclub

Help: http://mailman.qth.net/mmfaq.htm

Post: mailto: AlexandriaRadioClub@mailman.qth.net

This list hosted by: http://www.qsl.net. Please help support this email list:

http://www.qsl.net/donate.html

Club Leadership

Elected Officers for 2024 * †

Sean Gallagher, K4KBK—President

Bob Crumley, KO4ZIK

—Vice President

Carol Myers, KN4LLL—Secretary

Erik Misavage, KI4BXU—Treasurer

Sandy Kenyon, KQ4DNE Joseph A. Porcelli, KT3I

Paul Cataldo, KQ4LJS

† Don Lewis, KI4D, was elected President in November, 2023, but resigned for health reasons on Jan. 12, 2024, at which time Sean Gallagher assumed the Presidency. The office of Vice President and a Director's position were filled by a special election at the February 9, 2024 meeting.

Committee Chairmen

Jan Maas, KB2LRX—Public Information Officer (PIO)

Past Presidents/Life Members

Rich Adamy, KA4GFY (Life Member) Rick Bunn, N4ASX (Life Member) Marshall DeBerry, KI4MWP (Life

Member)

Ted Einersen, W9TCE

Harry Jones, N4CWP (Life Member)

Ian Keith, N8IK

Club Leadership Group members may be contacted using the following email addresses:

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ARC-SHORTS compiled by Jan A. Maas (KB2LRX) - ARC Public Information Officer

Gary Sessums, KC5QCN—Club Metro

Area Liaison

Tom Kirby, KJ4FUU Don Lewis, KI4D Richard Morani, KW4UJ Jim Stone, W4YUE

Larry Walker, K4LDW Monica Wilson, KC2IAY

Elected Board of Directors, At Large* †

^{*} Voting members of the leadership group are the elected officers and elected directors.