



Southern Peninsula Emergency Communications System

2024 Annual Newsletter

SPECS web site: www.specsnet.org

Announcing: the 2025 SPECS Annual Meeting

Date:	January 11th 2025
Time:	09:00 (room opens at 8:30 with coffee and light snacks)
Location:	El Camino Hospital Main Hospital, rooms E, F, G (in basement)
Speaker:	Jim Clark
Topic:	Increasing Monday Night Check-Ins, a.k.a. Increasing Ham Participation
Meeting Link:	meet.google.com/gvi-cndy-zsn

Renew your membership!

If you have not already: please [renew your membership online](#). Link is also on [the SPECS home page](#) (look for "Join or Renew Membership").

Only paid-up members can vote at the annual meeting.

Agenda

- Approval of prior years minutes
- Election of Officers
- Guest Speaker - Jim Clark
- Community Engagement Report - Stiv Ostenberg

- Future SPECS projects - Neil Katin

Election Notes

- Slate of nominees determined by nominating committee
- Additional Nominees will be solicited from the floor before any voting
- Interested in serving on the board? Get more info at board@specsnet.org.

Nominations:

- President: Grant Elliot
- Secretary: Neil Katin
- Treasurer: Jim Weatherford
- Community Outreach: Stiv Ostenberg
- At Large: Rick Van Mell
- At Large: Jerry Thalls
- At Large: Lea Roberts

In addition, Phil Hawkins will be the SPECS Repeater Association representative on the board.

Guest Speaker

We are honored to have Jim Clark, the Los Altos ARES/RACES Emergency Coordinator as our guest speaker. The topic abstract is:

Over the years Los Altos, has steadily increased their Monday Night check-in totals from single-digit numbers to counts in the mid-twenties. As the smallest city in the SPECS area, how did they do it? What lessons could be learned to help increase your city's numbers? Join us and hear how Los Altos approached this problem.

President's Message (Grant Elliot)

Your Board of Directors is an industrious crew. Meeting several times each year, they get the jobs done that are required by our 501 (C)(3) as well as those needed to meet our mission statement and our obligation to support SPECS-RA

(Repeater Association). I want to thank them all for their contributions to SPECS-UG (Users Group) and the community at large.

Our Secretary, Neil Katin, K2LL, keeps track of each Board meeting and publishes the minutes.

Our Treasurer, Jim Weatherford, WU6K, keeps track of our finances and submits all the documentation necessary to satisfy the IRS.

Our Outreach Chairman, Stiv Ostenberg, K9STV, has done a great job this year. Not only did he organize SPECS's successful hosting of our yearly Electronic Flea Market, but he turned all the Electronics Flea Markets into showcases for amateur radio and emergency communications by setting up spaces at each of the EFMs and demonstrating the usefulness of packet radio.

In addition, Stiv has established a "Meetup" group. Meetup announces various radio club meetings throughout the valley as well as other ham radio activities including a Parks on the Air at Monte Bello Open Space Preserve. These activities definitely raise awareness of amateur radio and will hopefully lead to more people getting involved in emergency communications.

The other three Board members, Rick Van Mell, KI6PUR, Jerry Thalls, KG6HI, and Lea Roberts, WA6ITV, all contribute their ideas and undertake various tasks as they come up.

Treasurer's Message (Jim Weatherford)

As of October 31, 2024, the SPECS Users Group has 98 current members; 14 are new for 2024. 72 are also members of the ARRL.

Membership dues (\$5) paid starting November 1 will apply to 2025. Note that your membership must be current for 2025 in order to vote in the Annual Meeting in January. Visit <https://www.specsnet.org/membership> to join SPECS or renew your membership.

SPECS currently has about \$41k in the bank. The June Electronics Flea Market, our main source of income, netted around \$1900 in 2024. Our expenses include government filing fees, ARRL club insurance, Meetup subscription, mailbox and web hosting fees, and refreshments for the Annual Meeting.

Community Outreach Message (Stiv Ostenberg)

The Future of Ham Radio

It's no secret that the demographics of Ham Radio show us heading towards a generational cliff. Ham Radio enthusiasts average age is climbing up, and new people are not coming on board faster than we are going silent key. As the Community Outreach Officer, I am trying to tackle this problem in the South Bay and beyond.

The fact that you are reading this column tells me that you are likely a Radio Operator. I don't know what inspired you to get your license, and to continue to participate. Do you remember? As a newish operator myself, I am overwhelmed by all the different aspects there are to the hobby. So much to explore! So much to learn and do! Why aren't people joining in droves? Why are people getting their license and then vanishing?

These are the questions I had to answer before I could start trying to address the problem. As in my professional career, I used my own experience as a metric. Why did it take me so long to get my General license? Why don't I have any of my county credentials? Why did I not get my license earlier? It is my belief that answering those questions will help solve the problem.

Why aren't people getting their licenses?

In today's world, we all carry a radio on our pocket. We can use it to call people anywhere in the world. Ham Radio is archaic and obsolete. Getting a license is difficult and requires you learn Morse Code. Ham Radio is just for old geezers who live in a shack.... Or so people believe.

If we want to save Ham Radio, we need to set the record straight. Ham Radio is relevant, getting a license is not a huge barrier, and there are lots of activities, both fun and related to disaster preparedness that simply are not possible with a cell phone.

This has been our failure. We have failed to reach the next generation and educate them about Ham Radio. The Internet is so bright and shiny that people get distracted and forget how fragile it actually is.

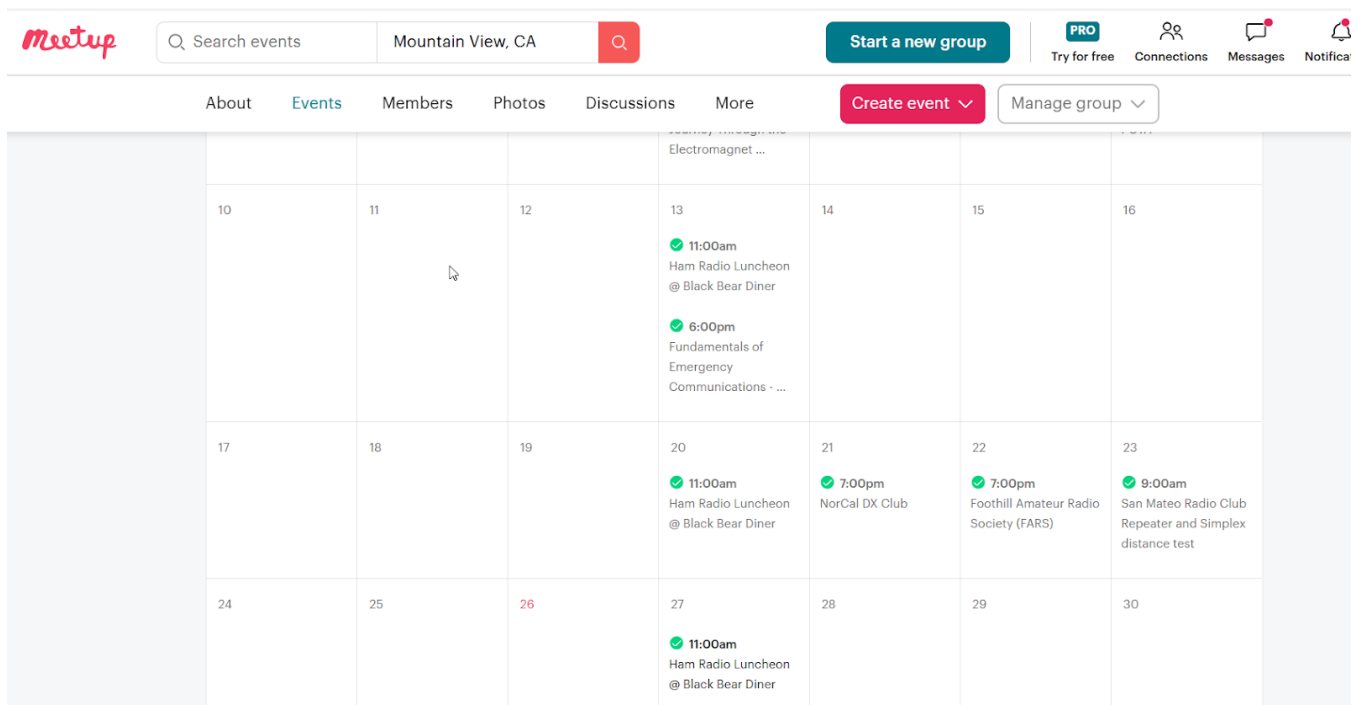
As Community Outreach Officer I have been attending the Electronics Flea Market every month with a booth to let people know about the world that opens before them with an Amateur license. I try to set up a demo station, and encourage others to do so. If you love the hobby, you need to share it. People can sense passion, and your love of radio can motivate others. Join me at the Flea Market, or find other ways to become an evangelist.

Why aren't people doing anything with their license?

This was one of my biggest frustrations as a new ham. I had expected Elmers to rain down from the sky bearing the golden fruits of knowledge for me to share. It didn't work that way. I am not good at asking for help, and the number of events appropriate for a new ham to learn was limited. Club Meetings are not good places to learn, and the speakers often cover topics so far over my head, or so irrelevant to what I am trying to do as to be a waste of time. Some clubs are pretty dormant, or have specialised purposes that do not lend themselves to nurturing new hams. Many clubs web sites are stale and have out of date information, which makes the hobby look like it is dying of apathy.

Solving this problem was the point of the MeetUp group that SPECS is funding. MeetUp is a social media site that promotes helping people find others who share their interests and facilitate doing in-person events. The site is not Ham Radio specific, but it does mean that Ham Radio events may show up on the list of possibilities for other people to engage in.

As Community Outreach Officer, I have been attending meetings of all the other clubs, and I regularly scour their websites looking for meetings and events to add to the MeetUp. It is my goal to make sure that new hams see that there is a lot more going on around here than just what a single club may be doing!



I am hoping that by providing more opportunities for new hams to engage with us in their new hobby, we will inspire them to continue their journey.

This is phase one of the MeetUp Project. In phase two, I convince the clubs to take over posting their own events, and help them in hosting more hands on events that will appeal to folks who want to do more with Ham Radio. I am hosting such events myself to prove it can be done. I hope others are inspired to do likewise. I also hope to do joint events with other MeetUp groups to introduce them to Ham Radio, such as joint Summits on the Air activations with the Bay Area Hiking and Anything Fun group. I figure hikers might like the SOTA ([Summits On The Air](#)) experience, and there are 7000 members (potential hams!) in that group.....

I also prepared a PowerPoint presentation that covers many of the varied activities in ham radio new hams may not know about. I know I keep getting surprised! It was only 12 years after I got my license that I learned about the 9am Talk Net. I want new hams to have all this at their fingertips, and not to have to dig for it.

How do we build community?

The MeetUp Project is an ambitious project to revitalise our Ham Community. There are problems, however. As you probably are aware, a small percentage of hams carry a disproportionate amount of the workload. Club Officers are overworked, and volunteers are hard to find. New Hams may not bother connecting to a club, or an appropriate club, to help them along.

This brings us to the second phase of my outreach: Groups.IO. If you are not aware of Groups.IO, it is the same collaboration solution that County ARES/RACES uses. The site basically uses Email lists to send messages to a group of people, and members are able to communicate with the whole list. The advantage of Groups.IO is that contacts are able to add or remove themselves at will, so people do not receive spam on topics they no longer care about.

Members must join the “Announce” group to participate, and should only get 1 or 2 messages a month from said group. The Subgroups are another matter..

I have created a subgroup for every club in the Bay Area, and can create more if needed. This will help new hams easily find and contact any and all clubs in a single location.

More importantly, I have set up a group called “Ham Angels” for all of us who are willing to help out other clubs or organisations from time to time. This is where clubs can look for speakers, or volunteers to help at events. People who sign up don’t have any obligation to answer, just to consider requests that come along. I think we all benefit by working together, and this is the channel to use to do that.

There is also a channel especially for the Electronics Flea Market. Individual clubs may have trouble finding enough volunteers and may need outside help. In addition to the clubs, I intend to ask for volunteers to set up stations and operate at the Flea Market.

There is a channel for folks who need help coordinating a MeetUp event. I would like to see each club host periodic events especially to welcome new hams. Perhaps clubs can cooperate to sponsor such events?

What can YOU do?

This is where I need your help. I cannot succeed in this mission alone. I need you to join me and contribute to this vision. I am not asking much:

1: Join MeetUp.com.

I am not requiring you to host events. All I ask is that you join, check the calendar, and sign up for events you attend. If we want to attract new Hams, they need to see there are other people involved. Even though a club meeting may have 20 people show up, if the MeetUp only shows me and one or two other people signed up, prospective attendees are going to blow it off. Signing up shows them people care about what the club does.

2: Subscribe to Groups.IO.

If nothing else, join the group for your club(s). If you are willing to take part in promoting Ham Radio, join the relevant subgroups. If you have ideas, let's share them. I particularly welcome ideas for how clubs can cooperate on building and maintaining shared resources (CHIRP Files, lists of Nets, list of Clubs and contacts, Radio Cheat Sheets, Programming guides, etc) that will benefit all of us, and eliminate redundant work.

What has SPECS done?

All that I have done, working with the other clubs, producing PowerPoint presentations to promote Ham Radio, the events on MeetUp.com are possible because the SPECS board has supported my efforts. In this, SPECS is responsible for doing more across the South Bay to promote Ham Radio than any other club. This year, I will be hosting a forum at Pacificon as an example of ways other clubs can follow our example.

At present, you can find links to everything I am working on at this stub website.

gsl.net/k9stv/

The fileshare on this site is simply a copy of everything I have collected that you might benefit from, though I would like to see it eventually be a resource all the clubs contribute to. Intended to support CERT groups by providing a single

internet file source to synchronise with to keep all your EmComm resources up to date.

What's next for the SPECS Repeater Association? (Neil Katin)

We (SPECS-RA) finished the multi-year project of moving the repeater to the new Sobrato building at El Camino Mountain View.

We'd like some feedback on what projects would be of most value to the greater SPECS community. Here's a list of projects we've thought of, but we are very interested in the community's thoughts, either on these specific projects or other projects you think would be valuable.

Current Repeater setup:

- We've had sporadic reports of low power on VHF and 220 and the El Camino Site. (The backup site doesn't have this issue). Nothing consistent, and it is unclear what the problem is (or even if there is a problem).

New projects, Amateur Radio:

- Providing internet linking for our El Camino Repeaters (e.g. Echolink, like N6NFI has)
- Providing additional digital modes. Of course, that begs the question: which one(s)? (DMR, D-Star, System Fusion, M17, etc). Is it worth it, given the lack of installed base for any system? Let us know what you think.

New projects, emergency communications but not necessarily Amateur Radio

- Hi Speed Digital Mesh (e.g. AREDN), perhaps amateur based, but perhaps with encryption instead
- Low Speed Digital Mesh (e.g. something like Meshtastic)
- Your thoughts on services that would benefit emergency services.

Come to the annual meeting to give feedback on this, or send an email to specs-ra@specsnet.org.

W6ASH repeater system status report (Phil Hawkins)

This year (2024) the repeater system: 145.270, 224.140 and 440.800 has been functioning with very little problems in the year after the move from the old hospital building to the new location at El Camino hospital on the roof of the Sabrato Pavilion. In June, the two-meter repeater went through a full re-alignment and “check-up” with the repeater now working within operational specifications and functioning nominally. The other two repeaters (220 and 440) were found to be working within specifications and having with no issues. One of the last things that needed to be addressed after move from the old building was the connection of the phone system to the repeater, which is still using a POTS system. The phone line connected to the repeater controller allows for the users to transmit from their radio commands to the repeater to dial various pre-programmed telephone numbers for calls to automated local airport weather recordings as well as being used as an autopatch. Upgrading the phone system to newer standards, VOIP, is one of the goals for 2025. Additionally, with all three repeaters, the linking of each repeater to the other two repeaters is operational and the remote base is functioning as expected with the on-command link to AA6BT and currently K6NSY working with no reported problems; the remote base link to N6NAC is not serviceable at this time.

With regard to the new location for the repeaters (Sabrato Pavilion), the two-meter repeater is currently experiencing some infrequent (and sporadic) short bursts of noise that activates the repeater. This burst of noise is so infrequent and short-lived (less than 10 seconds) that it does not present a problem for normal repeater operation. In the event of a larger problem occurring though, the capability exists for the activation of backup repeaters on 145.270 and 440.800 which are located in Los Altos with higher elevation. These back-up repeaters are on “Hot Standby” and are on a different pl tone than the main repeaters that are located at the hospital. These back-up repeaters are owned and maintained by the SPECS RA. In the event of a main (El Camino Hospital) repeater failure, these back up repeaters can be activated on demand quickly by SPECS-RA for emergency or general use.

Another major event that happened this year was the retirement of Dave Platt (AE6EO) from the SPECS RA in July of this year. Dave’s invaluable service to SPECS RA as to the design, implementation, maintenance, administration and

ultimately the move of the W6ASH repeater system, is very much appreciated and will be missed. Thank-you Dave for all the work you have done with the W6ASH repeater as well as the elmering and advise you have given and help you have done for all of us in SPECS and the newer members of the SPECS-RA.

For more information about the operation of the W6ASH repeater system, please contact me Phil Hawkins at ka6mze@gmail.com