

A group of hams in Mesa, Arizona “takes it to the park” every week, and if you contact them, you never know what they’ll be using to put their signals into the air.

# “Two Blue Lawn Chairs 20 Feet High” Antennas in the Park

BY JUDY FERRARA,\* K7JLF

**A** little more than two years ago, I heard about a group of hams that goes out to Red Mountain Park in Mesa, Arizona, every Thursday morning ... to play with antennas. It caught my interest and in April, 2009, I showed up at the park, with notebook and camera in hand. I started asking questions, and they explained what they were doing and why. Not one of them made me feel “out of place.” I have since become a regular part of the group and look forward to our weekly sessions.

### My Own Ham Radio Story

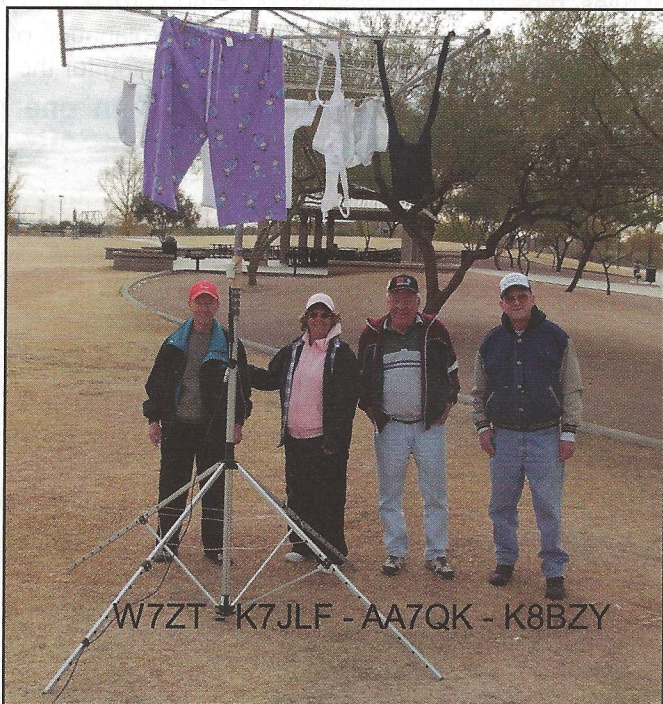
A little background on how I got into the hobby of amateur radio. About 15 years ago, I was encouraged by my brother Bob, WB6VYH, in California to get my ham license. He even sent me a book with the test questions and answers and told me to read, read, and read again. I was so excited at the thought of being able to talk to the world, I went to RadioShack and bought myself a small HTX 202 radio and began reading. But my then-husband told me NO, I couldn’t do that, and that was the end of my amateur radio hobby ... for then.

Fast forward to 2004, married again, I found the old test book and radio in a box. I was determined that I would try again to get into ham radio and I now had a computer on which to do practice testing. My husband asked what I was doing on the computer so I related the story of wanting to be a ham radio operator. He asked if he could study with me. We took the practice tests online as well as a class at the local college. In December of 2004, both of us earned our licenses and it has been a wonderful hobby for me!

Being a person who didn’t know a thing about electronics to start with (my brother inherited all the electronic genes in the family), it has been slow learning for me but I never wanted to give up. That’s why I was intrigued when I heard about experimenting with antennas at the park.

### Taking it to the Park

It all started a few years back, when two guys, Bill Maynard, W7ZT, and Tom Liska, K9CJM, got together and started experimenting with putting up different antennas on different hilltops in different parks. They told someone what they were doing, another one showed up, and over the years other



Bill Maynard, W7ZT; author Judy Ferrara, K7JLF; Nick Spencer, AA7QK; Earl Allen, K8BZY ... and laundry for a real “clothes-line” antenna at their weekly Antennas in the Park adventure!

hams joined these informal meetings at the park, sharing ideas, experimenting, and learning. Some days we have just four of us, some days there might be 20 or more out there.

We set up antennas of every sort imaginable and try to make contacts around the world.<sup>1</sup> This is done every Thursday, rain or shine. Sometimes there may only be two antennas; other times, as many as ten. We experiment to see if things work, or help others learn the whys and hows of antennas. There are lots of people who come and go on Thursdays; some are hams, some are not but would like to be, some belong to one club or another, some don’t belong to any club. This isn’t a club event, just some hams getting together.

Each Thursday through the heat of Arizona’s summer, a small but hardy group of us helped each other, bringing out

1058 S. 97th St., Mesa, AZ 85208  
e-mail: <K7JLF@arrl.net>





*Yes, lawn chairs can radiate (or at least that's what they tell us). Somehow, the group managed to make contacts on their lawn chair dipole.*

our equipment from the vehicles, setting it up, taking it down and putting the equipment back into the vehicles. At first it was normal antennas. With cooler weather and fall madness came the "lawn chairs in the sky," an "umbrella" antenna, "pizza pan antenna," a "string of Christmas lights" antenna, a "Christmas tree" antenna, backpack antenna and even contacts made on a "clothes line antenna," complete with the laundry!

Sometimes, someone will come to the park and ask how to use their newly acquired antenna, and we all jump in, get it set up, sometimes read the manual if need be, and get the guy on the air to make sure his antenna works.

We set up our radios and will let different people use them—especially those hams who are not able to put up an antenna or don't have portable stations to use—so they have a chance to make contacts. We have made contacts to the Black Forest in Germany, Hawaii, Belgium, many other countries and lots of contacts in the USA. We have used batteries, 110-volt AC, low



*Here's a pizza pan antenna (second from left)! Now if they could mount them horizontally and "load them up" with pizza dough, sauce, and toppings, then the Arizona sun might provide them with lunch when it's time to tear down!*





*Now that's what we call a top-hat! Bill Maynard, W7ZT, with his umbrella antenna.*

power, and never more than 100 watts. Some antennas were only a few feet tall and none over 24 feet. The surprise in our contact's voice when we say, "I am using two blue lawn chairs 20 feet high for this contact," was priceless! We get a lot of laughs, and there are a lot of great people out there in the HF world who let us break into their conversations or nets to see if we can make the contact and check out how well the antennas are working.

Sometimes we sit afterward and ask questions. With hundreds of combined years of ham radio experience in the group, there is no lack of answers or humor. I can tell you that I have learned a lot from this gathering of hams and I couldn't pick a nicer bunch of people to hang out with at the local park. I have taken hundreds of pictures<sup>2</sup> and lots of notes on the simplest things that are normal to the hams that have been in the hobby for many years, but very important information to know for a non-technical ham. When my husband, Tony, K7AJF, comes home from work, we sit in front of the computer and I show him the pictures from the park. I explain what and why certain things were done so he can help me with the antennas here at home. We have learned more in the last two years from the group in the park than we have in the four years prior, attending club meetings and Field Days.

## Beyond Antennas

The park gathering is loaded with teamwork. Setting up radios and antennas so close to each other does cause interference but we all share the bands, letting whoever has a good contact finish their call. I have learned how to put up my own 24-

foot mast without breaking the fiberglass poles, easy ways to attach guy wires, how to use the antenna analyzer, which way to stretch out and how to use the counterpoises for the antenna, and so much more! Along the way, I have also learned about Echolink, PSK31, and QRP; and started teaching about ham radio.

We have people who stop to chat about what we are doing and we give them information on local clubs, how to get started, classes and an invite to come back and join us there at the park, whether or not they have a license. Some have gone on to earn their licenses.

A lot of hams also come out to the park, just to see what we are doing, to visit, to share, to have fun. I had a rough time getting into the hobby, but there is no stopping me now. I just acquired a keyer and paddles, and we have now added a CW practice class to our weekly outing. A 20-minute CW class won't interfere with our weekly mini field days in the park. I would like to say special thanks to all the hams who have helped me learn about ham radio in a fun way.

Try it in your area; it might just be the highlight of your week, as it is mine! Maybe someone will come around and ask you about the hobby.

## Notes

1. We are very fortunate that we are able to do this every week without needing permits or reservations. We're usually there early, between 6 and 10 AM, before any of the park's pavilions are in use for picnics or other activities.

2. Judy's photo collection can be seen on the web at <<https://picasaweb.google.com/k7jlf.judy>>.

**Designed by**  
**HAMS FOR HAMS**



Bird® Model 43



Duplexers for  
**D-STAR**



Antenna Tester

**Visit Bird® at HAMVENTION**  
**May 20-22 2011**  
**Booth's BA0413 & BA0414**



**BIRD**  
TECHNOLOGIES GROUP  
BIRD ELECTRONIC  
TR. RX SYSTEMS  
R.COM SYSTEMS

[www.birdrf.com/ham/cqp](http://www.birdrf.com/ham/cqp)

