

Chicks Dig Morse Code

The Story of Grosse Point Lighthouse 2002

By Mike Dinelli, N9BOR

Yep, it's true—Chicks dig Morse code. I must admit that it's been a challenge convincing my XYL of this fact, but we proved it at Grosse Point Lighthouse!

MAC's setup contingent arrives at 11:30 AM, and within an hour we are receiving incoming signals from Dave Sher's workhorse IC-735. After checking the vertical antenna's resonance, we are ready for a test. Jim Quinn, K9JQ, answers our short CQ and says we're booming -- it's always a pleasure working MAC members from our special events stations. After signing with Jim, another MAC member, Dick Sylvan, W9CBT, calls us.

We're located in the garden directly behind the lighthouse with a clear view of the lake. The setting is beautiful and combined with great weather we are blessed with many visitors. We set up a couple of speakers so visitors could hear both us and the stations we're working. As I chit-chat with Dick, several excited YLs ride up on bicycles.

Steve, N9WAT, handles PR with our visitors, and I notice smiles on every side. I try to concentrate on Dick's flawless sending, but I lift the headphones to hear the conversation around me. *"Are you really talking to someone with Morse code?"* Asks one of the young women. *"Yes, we are."* Steve answers. Just then I'm aware Dick sent a question mark, but I have no idea what he's asking. Oops... the cans go back on both ears now.

It should surprise no one that an Internet and cell phone jaded public should find Morse code fascinating. Most non-hams do not realize thousands of radio amateurs use Morse code everyday. They cast a glare of skepticism when you tell them we're "talking" with someone in Paris right now, using that little antenna over there. Ham radio is cool, but many people do not know it (yet).

A little later an eight-year-old boy named Alex rides up on his two-wheeler. He's heard strange beeping and is seeking its source. *"What are you doing?"* he exclaims with bright eyes. After a brief explanation we invite him to learn to send his name in Morse code. Upon successful completion of his task, Alex is awarded with a MAC Certificate of Achievement. His dad signs the visitors log and asks about our Fall Ham Radio classes.

At one point we have five young boys huddled around Steve, N9WAT, and a code practice oscillator he built into an Altoids tin. Each of the boys take a turn sending his own name. Through the day, several newly-licensed hams stop by and request help in learning code. It is astounding to see licensed hams who have never seen telegraphy in action. We have a difficult time convincing one visitor that the computer is only sending the code and not decoding it.

This year's Grosse Point lighthouse will be remembered not by the number of contacts we made, or the DX we worked. The images left are of a sunny day, a beautiful setting, the time spent with friends, and the bright eyes of visitors witnessing ham radio for the first time.

Our special thanks to Don Terras, Director of the Evanston Lighthouse Park District. Our gracious host invited us back for next year's International Lighthouse-Lightship Weekend. An offer that is difficult to refuse. □