

Club Spotlight



W5RRR



Johnson Space Center Amateur Radio Club

Founded: 1967	ARRL Affiliation Date: May 30, 1989
Voting Licensed Amateur Members: 73	Meetings: Monthly
Members: 75	Website: www.w5rrr.org
Section: South Texas	Focus: Space comms., STEM outreach

A Club and a Mission

For more than 5 decades, the Johnson Space Center Amateur Radio Club (JSCARC) has been using amateur radio to bring both hams and non-hams closer to the stars — and to each other. The operators employed at NASA's JSC meet under the call sign W5RRR to serve the space agency, the amateur community, and the public.

Pathways to Success

It was this same club that collaborated with NASA astronaut Owen Garriott, W5LFL (SK), to take a ham radio into space during the STS-9 mission. This first-time event led to their assistance with the Shuttle Amateur Radio Experiment. JSCARC knew they needed to continue their science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) outreach at schools (when they're not helping the astronauts get licensed), so they're now affiliated with Amateur Radio on the International Space Station (ARISS). To them, it's a worthy effort that gets the ball rolling for future STEM majors and future hams. "Members have set

up ARISS contacts with elementary schools by installing antennas on school roofs, training students on how to speak into a microphone, and operating transceivers while students asked questions to in-flight astronauts," said JSCARC member George Fletcher, AD5CQ.

JSCARC reaches the high school, undergrad, and grad crowd, too, via NASA's Pathways Internship Program. They sponsor a group of JSC interns each semester to get them licensed and on the air. Club members continually develop hands-on activities to keep these young scientists eager for more, including soldering exercises, radio and antenna builds, foxhunts, and Morse code practice.

These projects are documented on their club website, like their most recent initiative: launching and tracking pico balloons. The excitement is mutual. "As a recently retired NASA guy, I get some personal reward out of teaching JSC interns about launching balloons carrying ham radio," said JSCARC Trustee John Maca, AB5SS. The activity

directly applies to the electronics, avionics, and hardware/software know-how they'll need at the center for human spaceflight. On the flip side, it gives them a glimpse into digital modes, satellite tracking, weak-signal communications, and propagation. One of their balloons, KI5CWE-1, stayed aloft for an impressive 122+ days. "It's kind of like investing in [their] future success here," he added.

Looking Up and Ahead

Investing in the future is indeed a JSCARC priority. Like any amateur radio club, they feel the strain that comes with growing membership despite wins in youth outreach, so they lean on each other to nurture their strengths while also seeking outside opportunities. Although they recently earned a STEM-based grant and JSC sponsorship to improve their station, much equipment was bought and installed by fellow members. Station maintenance is also handled by their own. "Our club members' resourcefulness is an asset [that] can overcome almost any obstacle," said JSCARC Secretary David Lee, W5OC.

The club is tackling several projects for 2026. Amid plans to erect a new 60-foot self-standing tower for expanded HF/VHF/UHF/microwave capabilities, they're continuing to work with Houston's Lone Star Flight Museum for further outreach. Outlines for a radio merit badge program, an informational ham radio booth at the annual Girls in Aviation Day gathering, and an "Aviation Museums On the Air" event are being devised. For more information and even more JSCARC efforts not covered here, visit www.w5rrr.org.