

# **The Maryland FM Association, Inc. Turns *Fifty Seven***

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By: Bruce Carpenter, W3YVV

The Maryland FM Association, Inc., more commonly known as The MFMA, was incorporated on June 17, 1966 by K3NZZ, Jerry Bate (SK), W3TRG, Bob McMahon (SK) and W3YVV, Bruce Carpenter.

This organization was drawn together by the development of Channelized FM operation on 2 meters which had begun to develop in the Baltimore - Washington area about 1962. The first Channelized FM operation I am aware of originated in 1956 when the Maryland State RACES Organization and the Anne Arundel County Office of Civil Defense acquired commercial General Electric equipment and issued it to the RACES affiliated Anne Arundel Radio Club. A plan for Channelized FM operation on 6 and 2 Meters which designated various "Channels" to Amateur RACES operations across the state was developed at the State RACES level.

Those of us involved in these activities desired to acquire additional equipment to expand the FM operations. Amateurs were indirectly aided in this endeavor as the need for additional channels for Public Safety and Commercial radio users grew and the FCC developed a "Narrow Band Plan" that was implemented during the late 50's. During this time much of the FM equipment that was used in Public Safety and Commercial service was replaced and the older, wide band, equipment was put on the surplus market. General Electric, Link, Motorola, and RCA equipment generally designed for single channel operation from 6 volt battery systems was acquired and modified to cover the amateur bands. AC power supplies were built and interfaced to the equipment to permit "base" station operation.

As interest grew in this mode of operation, and more 150 "Megacycle" equipment became available, the number of stations on 2 meters began to grow. The channelization plan developed by the RACES organization became the "band plan". Some individuals felt a repeater would provide a worthwhile advantage as the range was somewhat limited for mobile to mobile contacts.

In early 1963 a repeater was placed in operation by W3YVV in Harmans, Md. This repeater was a split site system with an input on 146.34 MHz. and an output on 146.94 MHz. 146.94 MHz. was the simplex operating frequency and it soon became apparent that the repeater needed a channel of its own. The repeater transmitter was shifted to 146.76 MHz. This necessitated conversion of mobile equipment to 2 frequency (channel) capability, not easily done on some equipment, and

therefore this limited the number of early repeater users. The input was later moved to 146.16 MHz. and the 600 kHz. separation, or split as it is known today, became standard.

Channelized FM operation began to catch on and other repeaters were established around the Country. By mid-1964 better locations were sought for the repeaters. Efforts to gain permission to use existing commercial tower sites brought with it the need for organization, insurance and related issues best served by a Club. During late 1964 an association of about 25 amateurs from the Baltimore - Washington area began a club, to be called The Maryland FM Association. The club took over operation of the W3YVV repeater and located the receiver at a tower site near Ellicott City, Md. The transmitter remained at Harmans. Later these Club members found it advantageous to Incorporate and did so in 1966.

Membership grew and monthly meeting attendance would sometimes total over 50 members. During the early 70's the growth of FM operation on 2 meters had caught the eyes of manufacturers of Amateur equipment and multi-channel amateur equipment began to appear on the market. As this new equipment and additional multi-channel retired commercial equipment became available operation on 2 meters grew tremendously. Attendance at some MFMA meetings held at Goddard Space Flight Center sometimes reached 150 people. Parking lot "mini fests" were held before the meetings. There were speakers on various topics related to Channelized FM operation.

As the repeater systems sponsored by MFMA grew, the need for financial support also grew. Equipment, commercial antennas and transmission lines, site leases and power bills added up. Although membership support was great, it was not adequate to meet the desires of the repeater users. The need for added financial resources grew and the MFMA Annual Hamfest was born, first held in National Guard Armories around the area and presently held in May of each year at the Howard County Fair Grounds in West Friendship, Md.

During the 57 year period since the incorporation of the organization we have seen many changes in Amateur Radio. Technology, an evolution of available equipment, license requirements and operator privileges among them. Over the years there was a tremendous growth in Channelized VHF and UHF FM operation although that has diminished in the last 10 years. Today there is limited daily activity on most repeaters with some continued simplex operation. Much of this is the result of the modern communications capabilities, like the cellular telephone, that are available to everyone.

MFMA membership averaged about 100 during the years of tremendous FM repeater activity, although this has dropped to less than 10 members today. The club presently sponsors linked repeaters on 146.76, 224.76 and 444.0 MHz. which are located in Jessup, Maryland. The 146.76 MHz. system has receivers located in Jessup, Ashton and Dayton Maryland to support the

**Baltimore-Washington Metropolitan area. A CTCSS tone of 107.2 Hz is required to access the repeaters. Meetings are held quarterly. The Board of Directors meet monthly to conduct necessary MFMA business.**

**MFMA sponsors the Memorial Day Hamfest annually during the Memorial Day weekend in May of each year. This event is held at the Howard County Fair Grounds in West Friendship Maryland and is generally well attended. Proceeds of the Hamfest are used to keep the repeater systems operational.**

**The MFMA recently made a donation to the American Radio Relay League, Inc. (ARRL) for a Brick to be placed in the Diamond Terrace at the ARRL Headquarters in Newington, Connecticut. The inscription on the brick reads "In Memory of Our Silent Keys, MD FM Assoc Inc."**

**Anyone interested in joining the Club or otherwise corresponding with the Club may write to the Maryland FM Association, Inc., PO Box 351, Hanover, Maryland 21076-0351.**

**Happy 57th. Birthday to The MFMA, Inc.**

**\* NOTE: Originally written in May 1996 for Auto Call Magazine, a publication of the Foundation for Amateur Radio which no longer exists today.**

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