



AMATEUR RADIO DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

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## PRESS RELEASE

### **Amateur Radio Digital Communications (ARDC) Makes Largest Donation to Date (\$1.62m) to Save the MIT Radome**

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If you've ever looked at the skyline at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), you likely have noticed the giant white sphere sitting atop the 277-foot-tall Cecil and Ida Green Building which towers above the heart of the campus. That iconic shape is a fiberglass radar dome — or radome — enclosing an 18-foot wide microwave dish, and it was recently slated for removal following necessary renovation on the building's roof. But the student-led MIT Radio Society (W1MX), with support from faculty in the Departments of Earth, Atmospheric and Planetary Sciences (EAPS), Aeronautics and Astronautics (AeroAstro), and Physics, saw an opportunity to possibly preserve the instrument for novel uses in remote learning and experimentation. Despite a tight timeline, the students rallied MIT alumni and community members in a crowdfunding campaign, and were able to secure a \$1.6 million grant from Amateur Radio Digital Communications (ARDC) to successfully meet their fundraising goals—and save the radome.

“Our philanthropic efforts are less than a couple years old, and this is by far our largest grant made to date,” says ARDC Director Dr. Bob McGwier (N4HY). “We are thrilled that this donation will support students and research at MIT for decades to come. We also hope this contribution helps get the message out that ARDC is excited to support amateur radio and digital communications projects of all sizes – including big ones, especially when the results will be so long-lasting.”

ARDC's grant program, initiated in 2019, funds projects related to amateur radio and digital communications science and technology. Additionally, the program has funded over 120 scholarships through the Foundation for Amateur Radio (FAR) and the American Radio Relay League (ARRL).

Initially built in 1966, the MIT radome and the large steerable instrument it protects (fondly referred to by its users as “The Big Dish”), was used to pioneer research which led to the weather radar systems in wide use today. It fell out of use for a number of years before the MIT Radio Society adapted and upgraded the dish for their microwave experiments, most notably enabling its use for Earth-Moon-Earth or “moonbounce” communication, where signals are bounced off the moon to reach Earth-bound receivers at greater distances than radio communications sent on the ground. The large size and far-reaching capabilities of the dish make it a unique scientific instrument in an academic setting, presenting opportunities for potential creative new uses in cutting-edge research, like satellite communication. Further, the

dish can also support educational activities, like enabling remote radio astronomy experiments so the Physics Junior Laboratory (J-Lab) course could continue with minimal disruption during the Covid-19 pandemic .

"We were overwhelmed at first by the amount we needed to raise, and the short time we had before the renovation project needed to begin. We just had to hope that someone would see the same promise and potential in the dish that we did," says Gregory Allan, a PhD student in the MIT AeroAstro who led ARDC grant submission efforts. "When we contacted ARDC, they were so supportive and willing to do whatever it took to make this happen. We're really grateful to them for this incredible gift."

To read more about MIT's efforts to save the radome, visit <http://w1mx.mit.edu/giving/>  
To learn more about ARDC's grantmaking efforts, visit <https://www.ampr.org/giving/>.

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