

Hampden County Radio Association Project Big E 2023

How many people did your ARDC funded project impact?

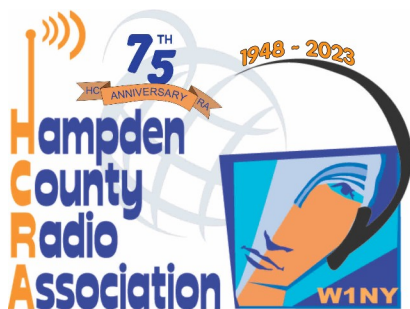
170 potential new hams and the 85+ volunteers

Please describe any major changes to your project or budget.

We ended up arranging the booth slightly differently than how we planned. We ended up with a bench up front again instead of in the center of the booth. This worked out ok for the booth after all and still gave it an open and inviting feel to it.

What advice would you give to other projects trying to do something similar? Did your project generate anything that you want to share with others or that others might find useful?

I would say that a committee is definitely needed. One person can direct, but others are needed for booth hardware setup, bringing attention to the booth, scheduling volunteers, scheduling of last-minute volunteer fill-ins, someone to oversee all printed material that is grammatically correct and proper. Someone to control website data, volunteers to help set up and tear down plus plan for storage of the booth ahead of time. It takes a committee to make this work whether it is for a day, three days, or 17 days like ours was. I would be more than happy to assist anyone undertaking a project like this.



The Hampden County Radio Association
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www.hcra.org

November 19, 2023

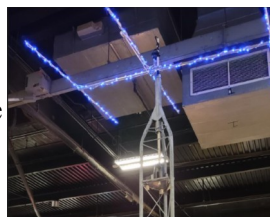
Dear ARDC,

Thank you very much for the grant for Project Big E 2023. We could not have accomplished what we did without your support.

The Big E is a New England state fair. Last year, in 2022, over 1.6 million people attended over a 17-day period. For 2023, we (the Big E ham radio booth committee) wanted to redesign the booth to make it more friendly. We also wanted to change the emphasis from “radio and communications” to “STEM Learning and communications”. For this year, the Big E drew over 1.4 million people through its gates. This year there was a lot of rain, which caused lower attendance over a few days.

We decided to restructure the layout of the booth to make it more friendly and welcoming to those walking by. The thought was to have a center booth extend out from the back. Like an inverted T. We also decided to have two 42 inch TV screens on either side of the booth showing photos & videos of hams in action plus lots of youth doing STEM and fun scientific projects. Plus two tables along the back wall where more could be displayed as well as projects or kits could be assembled.

One thing we brought over from the prior year was the 14-foot tower with 6-meter beam on top. We took a Christmas tree rotating device and modified it so it sat in the tower, like a radio rotator, and spun the beam. We added blinking LED lights to the beam this year to draw attention to it, which it did.



The Big E started on Friday, September 15th. That first day drew over 86,000 people through the gate. Our booth was in the Better Living Center, which is the largest and most popular of the buildings. It's fair to say that thousands of people passed by the booth every day.

Last year one of the biggest attractions to the booth was a pair of wooden, home made Morse code keys with a sounder. This year, we decided to expand upon that and had Bob; K1YO design a basic wooden Morse code key kit. Bob drew up plans and presented

2023 Daily Attendance

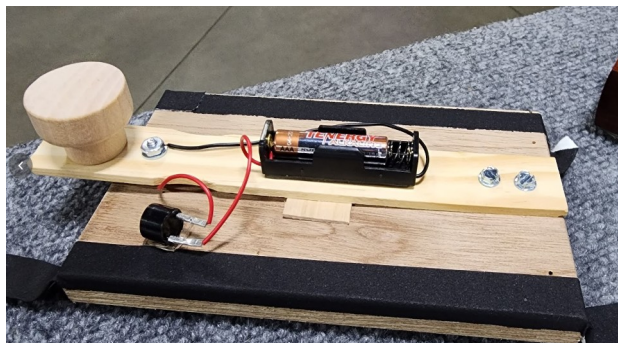
Friday, Sept. 15, 2023 -- 86,212
Saturday, Sept. 16, 2023 -- 95,541
Sunday, Sept. 17, 2023 -- 91,287
Monday, Sept. 18, 2023 -- 16,549
Tuesday, Sept. 19, 2023 -- 57,802*
Wednesday, Sept. 20, 2023 -- 72,849
Thursday, Sept. 21, 2023 -- 69,963
Friday, Sept. 22, 2023 -- 97,477*
Saturday, Sept. 23, 2023 -- 69,042
Sunday, Sept. 24, 2023 -- 70,549
Monday, Sept. 25, 2023 -- 37,981
Tuesday, Sept. 26, 2023 -- 63,688
Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2023 -- 95,689*
Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 -- 108,962*
Friday, Sept. 29, 2023 -- 46,674
Saturday, Sept. 30, 2023 -- 176,498
Sunday, Oct. 1, 2023 -- 170,471*

2023 TOTAL: 1,427,234

* Daily attendance record

** All-time single day attendance record

it to the committee and we ordered 200 kits. We separated the parts into one gallon zip lock bags and included the Morse code sheet and printed set of directions. We gave away these key kits to any interested youth. We had many of the youth build the kits on the table in the back of the booth and be able to take it home with them. Communication by Morse code is a winner with the younger crowd. This was a BIG hit. We figured the cost per key at close to \$3.50 per key. We gave away nearly all of the 200 kits. Some of the recipients were teachers who wanted to teach Morse code to their students and took sets of the directions so they could make up their own kits.



Anyone who showed interest in the Morse code key was shown the blue sheet, which had the Morse code on it and a space below to write their name. We then tapped out their name in cw and then instructed them on how to do the same. This was a BIG hit as well. Both youth and adults enjoyed this and usually wanted to learn more. We then asked them if they would like to build a kit there in the booth or take one home with them to build with their parents.

The booth is a trapezoid shape, so planning and setting up was a challenge. But hams are inventive and we made it work for us. The back of the booth had another booth behind us. All the other sides were open to the public.

The booth had to be staffed for 12 hours each day over 17 days. This was no small feat. This was also hard on the feet. We bought 24 inch by 24 inch by half inch interlocking mats and laid them down on the floor in a black and blue grid of sorts. Like a large checkers board. It looked great, drew some attention and was easy on our feet too. The padded floor was very welcome.



Appeals went out to clubs all over New England asking them to broadcast to their members that volunteers were needed for two, six hour shifts per day. Ten clubs volunteered for “club” shifts or “club” days. We had hams from each state, some coming in from as far away as 6 hour drives. In all, over 85 hams volunteered and a few for more than one shift.



The first shift ran from 9:30 am through 4 pm and the second from 3:30 pm through 10 pm. Some arrived early as some of the traffic jams were terrible and sitting in traffic for 2+ hours was not unusual. Mornings were the easiest to get parked and into the fair.

We also had a Qsl style card that we handed out which had a picture of youth operating a radio on the front and a small introduction to ham radio on the back with web links as to where to find more info, find a local club and an email address for more information. (funhamradio@gmail.com).

We also had a full section on the nediv.arrl.org website dedicated to the Big E. We had the full support of the New England Division Director and Vice Director as well as most of the Section Managers in New England too.

(<https://nediv.arrl.org/project-big-e>)

(<https://nediv.arrl.org/funhamradio>)

To attract volunteers, we purchased and provided tickets to most of the volunteers, others had to purchase tickets themselves and then put in for reimbursement costs. We also reimbursed everyone who parked in Gate 9 for \$10 per vehicle.



We had a sign up sheet for those interested in earning their Technician class licenses. Over 170 people signed up and those names are now being distributed to clubs across New England that hold classes.

We also had a sign up sheet for visiting hams. This too is being distributed to clubs across New England to let them contact these people to see if they are club members or are interested in joining a club. We had over 150 hams sign in as visitors.

If all goes well, we hope to have over a hundred new hams across New England, which will grow ham radio in New England and grow the clubs. This will result in making the clubs all much stronger and giving the ARRL possible new members.

Here is a link to all the photos from the booth from assembly, staffing the booth to tearing it down and storing it: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/Q32wUpWDf1YDCucJA>

Thank you for your support of this project. We could not have done it without your generous help.

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