

The Big E
By Tony Baker AA3HD
Photos by Tony Baker AA3HD and Larry Krainson W1AST



The Eastern States Exposition (ESE), better known as The Big E, took place this year from September 16th thru October 2nd. For those of you unfamiliar with The Big E, it is an annual event, (except in 2020 because of Covid) that has taken place for over 100 years on the fairgrounds in West Springfield, Massachusetts. ESE is a not-for-profit, educational institution.

While The Big E is structured similarly to other state fairs across America, it's more accurately a regional fair, representing all six New England states at its grounds, and featuring each of the New England states on a particular day during the fair. Maine Day this year was on Saturday September 17th. This year the fair featured more live musical acts than in the past, in addition to its regular agricultural competitions, circus spectacular, and of course, plenty of deep-fried treats that fair visitors expect. A record 1.6 million people attended the fair over the 17-day period.

But this year's fair had something no previous Big E had - an amateur radio booth. Fair organizers wanted a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) this year, so HAM radio was a perfect fit. The call sign N1EB was assigned to the amateur radio booth at the fair, which was making contacts in both analog and digital modes. You can imagine that manning a booth at The Big E for 12 hours a day for 17 days requires a lot of volunteers. Larry Krainson W1AST, President, Hampden County Radio Association, took on the task of seeing that the booth got set up, manned throughout the fair, and taken down. I was totally unaware of the push to get operators for The Big E amateur radio booth until I heard about it from Larry, an extremely competent and knowledgeable HAM operator and organizer.



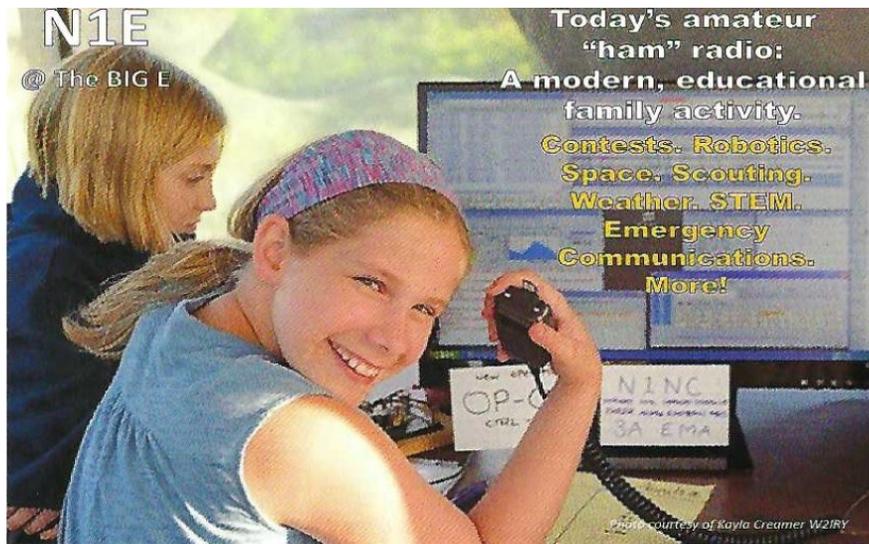
Volunteers on either side of Larry W1AST review procedures at the amateur radio booth at the Big E.

Larry was looking for operators from across New England, and as it turned out, Rick Alderette KB1ASM and I were the only operators that volunteered from Maine. Along with Marc Goldstein K8LSB and Larrie Sutliff W2UL, we manned the N1E station/booth from 3:30PM to 10:00PM on Sunday September 25th.



Larrie W2UL, Marc K8LSB, Tony AA3HD & Rick KB1ASM at the HAM radio booth at the Big E.

While at the booth we had visitors of all ages stop by. Likewise, the visitors varied in their HAM radio knowledge from knowing nothing at all to being licensed at the Expert level. We were also visited by ARRL New England Division Director Fred Kemmerer AB1OC and his wife Anita AB1QB, a pleasant surprise. Younger visitors were particularly attracted by the keys set up at the booth, and then tapping out their names in Morse code. Larry Krainson estimated that we gave out some 1200 QSL-like information cards during the event and rated it a real success. Larry further stressed we were able to show that "...HAM radio is still a viable and alive hobby that anyone can partake in."



Conversation with: _____ at *The BIG E* Date: _____

Ham radio is a hobby for the entire family. It lets you make friends around the world, help your community in times of local emergencies, assist with public safety, keep in touch while in the great outdoors, expand your love of technology...and that's just the beginning!

Interested in astronomy? Rockets? Robotics? Coding? It can help fuel those interests, too. It's a modern all-ages hobby!

Find out more! Bring your family to a club meeting. There's probably a club right in your home town. Take a look here: <https://bit.ly/MyLocalClub>

Or you can jot us a note at: FunHamRadio@gmail.com

Additional great info about ham radio is here: <https://bit.ly/FunHamRadio>

www.kb3ifhqslcards.com



 ARRL New England Division
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Front & back of QSL-like card given out at the Big E that provides information on HAM radio.

The highlight of the fair for many who were both HAM radio enthusiasts as well as those unfamiliar with HAM radio, was on September 27th when the fair's Arena was packed with visitors who wanted to witness amateur radio contact with the International Space Station (ISS). To view this QSO, copy and paste this link into your browser:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hdxnD8uF8t0>



Bob K5TEC signals a student to begin their question to the ISS.

Students from across New England were able to ask questions of ISS astronaut Bob Hines KI5RQT. New England Sci-Tech President Bob Phinney K5TEC was the person who headed up arranging the contact that was made through a station in Belgium. Amateur radio operators who had a copy of their FCC license on September 27th got into the fair for free and could also bring along up to three immediate family members who also got in for free... what a deal.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the Big E amateur radio booth, and if it happens again next year, I hope to be available to volunteer.

73 - Tony Baker - AA3HD