

History of the Little Current Cruisers' Net

In July of 2001, my wife and I and our two cats left Spider Bay Marina aboard our sailboat Mystic Loon for what would turn out to be a nine month cruise. The winter of 2001-2002 was spent in the Bahamas where much of it found us in the Sea of Abaco where I first listened to a Cruisers' Net out of Marsh Harbour. The informative weather man, a retired meteorologist, broadcast interesting news, but only American. Since over half the boats in the Abacos were flying the Canadian flag, I called in to ask if we could get some Canadian news. "Only if you do it" was the reply. As a Ham radio operator, I was able to get the Canadian news each night at 6pm so that's how I started my new career.

In 2003, we formed the first yacht club on Manitoulin Island - the Little Current Yacht Club. I was Commodore for the first three years. Bruce O'Hare, the man who talked me into taking on the job and one of the LCYC Rear Commodores, said that if I would manage a Cruisers' Net here in the North Channel, he would provide space at the Anchor Inn and donate all the equipment needed.

In July of 2004, I broadcast the first Little Current Cruisers' Net. I didn't keep any records and frankly, I don't remember too much about those early broadcasts other than fitting into a very tiny, very hot, cubicle under creaky stairs at the Anchor Inn. Five years later, I broadcast from a beautiful spacious conference room on the 2nd floor of the Anchor, with air conditioning, windows overlooking the harbour, lots of seating for visitors and an entire wall showcasing 54 club burgees donated to the Net by visiting boaters from around the world.

Near the end of the 2004 season, I received a call from the Coast Guard about an overdue boat. Had it called in? It hadn't but I realized that I needed to be keeping track of callers and their location, or where they were headed in case of a similar occurrence.

In 2005, I started recording the names of boats and their locations. First recorded broadcast that year was on July 4. One boat called in that day - Old Sam Peabody. On July 5, once again there was one caller. This time it was from a boat named Jiggs which would turn out to be Dave Naples of Paradise, an American who with his wife Sandy and their best friend Elliot Shore summer on Strawberry Island Channel. Those three have become the most helpful and willing volunteers associated with the Net.

On the 7th of July, Blue Heron, Raggedy Annie and Eleuthera checked in and were added to a mix of new friends which would grow over the years. The numbers of check-ins slowly grew and by the end of that year, I had recorded 1024 calls. On the last broadcast of the 2005 season, "Catamount" called in with Fred and Jennifer Bagley on board. Fred had written a number of cruising articles for national magazines and asked if they could interview Bruce O'Hare and me. That "Cruising World" article is now framed and hanging in the Anchor Inn lobby. Two years later, Fred's update was published in the online edition.

In 2006, on the first broadcast day, the number of boats calling in doubled. Yes, 2 boats called in that morning - old friends on Enchanted Summers and our new friend Dave Naples calling in as Paradise. But word of mouth and the Cruising World article spread the news about the existence of the Net and, by the year's end, 2073 calls had been recorded.

There have been numerous changes over the years. Being a ham radio operator, the broadcast from its earliest years started with the words "Is there any emergency, medical or priority traffic?" This sentence has generated calls from a boater with an embedded fish hook in his hand, a woman with

terrible back pain, a boat with a genoa halyard at the top of the mast and no bosun's chair to fix it, and lost cameras, dinghies and assorted gear. In each case we, or the boating community, were able to provide assistance. Also at this time, I report on any Coast Guard or family emergency calls which I may have received.

We are fully licensed as a shore station, granted permission to broadcast on Channel 16 and on Channel 71. The Net is registered with both the Canadian Coast Guard and the Air, Search and Rescue unit out of Trenton and each unit has my personal phone number. Last year for the first time, I received a phone call from the American Coast Guard about an overdue boat so they have our number also.

From the beginning, I've reported about 1 ½ pages of news together with Manitoulin events. This year, during the height of the season when there are so many activities, I broadcast 6-7 pages.

News from the fields of sports, business, the stock market are all in response to boaters requesting such information be included in the broadcast. I retired as Principal of Manitoulin Secondary School and "This Day in History" comes from my time in the school system when for several years, I would report it over the school's PA with the morning announcements.

The history reports on our area, which I sprinkle in over the summer, are a result of the persistence of a very special lady who kept insisting I had to write up the tales I had been telling her and her friends. So far, the only request I've consistently turned down is to report items for sale by boaters. This is a regular feature of Caribbean nets along with restaurants calling in their daily specials, and sale specials in the different stores, but commercialization is not allowed on a VHF broadcast in Canada. You may note that although I certainly wish to thank the Anchor Inn for providing us with wonderful facilities to do our broadcast the only PR they get on air is the sentence "The Little Current Cruisers' Net broadcasts each morning at 9 am on Channel 71 from the Anchor Inn, where boaters who have their own laptop can enjoy free high speed wireless internet service."

The reach of the broadcast has extended to unbelievable lengths with the addition of a new antenna two years ago. Thanks to generous donations from the boating community, in 2007, I was able to purchase a \$400 antenna system. With a tower situated above the third floor of the Anchor Inn, it gives us a height of 110 feet above the water.

2009 was the sixth season of the Cruisers' Net. This season started with a Winter Cruisers' Net Party at the home of Germaine and Terry Hyatt in Punta Gorda, Florida. For the past seven years, they spent their summers cruising the waters of the North Channel on their beautiful sailboat, BLUE HERON. On Feb. 18, they hosted a Cruises' Net Party – Florida Style. Boaters arrived from their winter residences and RV parks across Florida and the Southwest U.S. to join in the fellowship. In total, 39 boaters from home ports in Ontario, the northern U.S. and Florida attended to take part in what Germaine promises is only the first of many annual Winter Cruisers' Net get-togethers.

This year started slowly due to the decrease in the number of boats cruising our area. After two weeks, the number of call-ins totaled over one hundred less than the previous year. **BUT**, by season's end on August 31, a new record had been set with 5,846 calls being recorded from 1,003 individual boats. The record number of calls in one morning occurred on August 2 when 161 boats called in. Thank goodness there were a number of people present to help record the names and locations.

Speaking of helping, I am very grateful to Tom Geggie, David Naples, Fred Burger and Fred and Jennifer Bagley who assisted doing the broadcasts when I was unable. In addition, each morning it was such a pleasure

to have boaters drop in to listen to the broadcast and volunteer to help out by recording the names of the boats calling in. Thank you all.

This year donations from the Anchor Inn, The Little Current Yacht Club and many of the area boaters allowed me to purchase over \$1,400 in new equipment. The major expense was a new commercial radio costing over \$800. An ordinary VHF radio is made for short transmission times. Doing a long broadcast overheats the radio and degrades the signal. Our faithful VHF was slowly dying. Boaters immediately noticed the improvement in the distance the signal reached and the clarity of the transmission. Unfortunately, it does not improve reception and another new feature was added. With the increased range we reach more distant areas so when we ask for boats to call in, the areas are broken down into very specific segments starting from the east on even numbered days and the west on odd numbered days. With the new radio, boats have used relays to tell us they were receiving the Net from 8 miles north of Lion's Head in Georgian Bay, sitting at the docks in Tobermory, and north of Drummond Island to the west. In addition to the new radio, desk microphone, fan, and other equipment, I was able to purchase a high quality SWR meter which can test VHF, SSB and HAM radio operations for boaters. Also, a portable VHF antenna and 20 feet of coax help diagnose more difficult problems. This is a free service, so if you would like your radio tested, please call in next summer and I'll be happy to test your equipment.

This year, we hosted two parties, the last being to celebrate the 5,000th caller. What a great turnout as 117 people from 54 boats filled the new pavilion area to enjoy a pot luck supper and receive prizes donated by the Anchor Inn, Turners of Little Current and the Little Current Yacht Club. We also hosted five Cruisers' Net Happy Hours at the Anchor Inn on Fridays from 3pm-5pm with an average of 30+ boaters showing up for free hors d'oeuvres and great fellowship.

On Oct. 3rd, the Little Current Yacht Club held its Annual General Membership Meeting. What a surprise and honour to receive an award from the executive – an appreciation plaque addressed to “the Voice of the Little Current Yacht Club” commemorating 5, 800 call-ins. Thank you very, very much.

In closing, I look forward to your safe return next summer, renewing friendships and making new ones. If you haven't dropped in to the broadcast room on the second floor of the Anchor Inn, please make it a point to do so next summer and have your picture taken to be part of the history of the Net.

Stats for	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
First Day Check-ins	1	2	20	42	35
Last Day Check-ins	16	26	24	53	47
Average Daily # of Calls	16	33	56	76	96
Season's total calls	1024	2043	3450	4708	5,846
Distinct Boats Calling In	342	532	742	825	1,003

- The Cruisers' Net operated in 2004 but no records were kept.