

"I'm the producer of the new Tim Allen show for ABC," read the e-mail. "Recently, I created a 'Ham Radio Challenge' for my office staff. We held the test on our studio lot and seven passed ... Are you guys interested in (an article)?" The answer, of course, was yes, and here it is!

Producing Ham Radio

BY JOHN AMODEO,* NN6JA

I've been a ham for about 40 years (WB2HLO, KA6MVE, now NN6JA) and a television producer for the last 20. You may know some of the shows I've produced. They include "Sports Night," "Titus," "Arrested Development," "Samantha Who?" "Accidentally on Purpose," and a few I don't talk about.

To a great extent, I owe my television career to my pre-teen days reading and rereading the *ARRL Handbook*. The electronics knowledge I acquired from my original Technician license and later my General license was directly applicable to my early days as a video engineer and editor. As I moved up the ladder, I was able to talk to my technical crews with full confidence because we spoke the same language. Even now as a producer, I frequently use this knowledge.

A few months ago, I began working on "Last Man Standing" (*Visit: <<http://abc.tv/qVtzUg>>*), a new sitcom starring Tim Allen¹, produced for the ABC network. Around the same time, I decided to upgrade to Extra and enjoyed the process quite a lot. When I spoke about my hobby with my staff, I was surprised to find that many of them were interested in what made amateur radio so important. I gave them the most direct explanation possible: When earthquakes hit, tsunamis strike, zombies attack, the machines rise up against mankind, the phones and internet may be down, but ham radio will still be here!

The Ham Radio Challenge

After a few conversations, some of the staff became interested in amateur radio, so I decided to create the "Ham Radio Challenge." Staff members who

successfully passed the Technician examination would get a free dual-band HT. A number of the staff accepted the challenge.

I should mention that all of the crew members are familiar with basic handheld radio operations. We use the 16-channel version of the Motorola CP200s in the UHF business band all day for communications between our offices and our stage. Each department has a channel. The assistant directors (who run the stage) are on channel 1, inter-department communications are on 2, transportation is on 3, etc.

We began studying by printing the Technician question pool and having "Ham Radio Lunches." Each day we sat outside, ate lunch, and talked through a few pages of the question pool. The participants also started taking daily online practice exams from the QRZ <<http://www.qrz.com/ht/>> and AA9PW <<http://aa9pw.com/>> websites. I asked them to think of it as a few less hours a week on "Facebook" while taking practice exams. To my surprise, within a few days I could hear discussions outside my door about frequency in relationship to wavelength!

At the same time, I started acquiring the radios from a dependable but low-cost (I could almost say "cheap") online vendor. I chose a reliable, although inexpensive, dual-band handheld as the reward.

Let me say that my staff works hard. A typical shooting day is 12 hours or longer. When it came time for the test, the idea of rounding them up and taking them to an exam on a Saturday or Sunday did not seem like it would work. I decided to try to have the exam on our studio lot.

"Last Man Standing" is produced by 20th Century Fox for the ABC Network and we shoot it on the CBS Studio Center Lot in Studio City, California, so



Tim Allen stars as a "manly-man" in a house full of women in the new ABC comedy, "Last Man Standing." Producer John Amodeo and at least seven of the show's staff members (but alas, not Allen ... yet) are hams. (Photo courtesy ABC TV)

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