

# The Sun

Serving the Sun City Center community

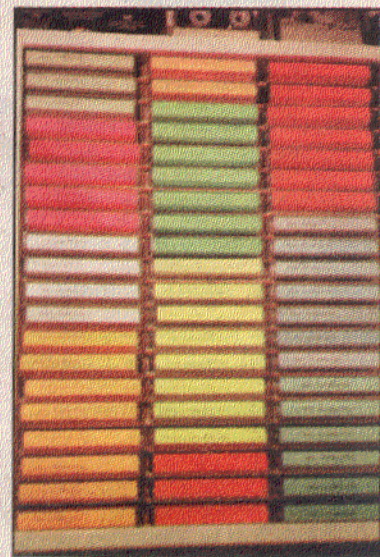
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KAREN L. JACOB/Staff photo



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John Bowker records information for a monthly audio service of broadcast news provided by the National Radio Club. His collection of tapes contains the recordings of station breaks for more than 12,000 radio stations throughout the country.

## coming in **LOUD** and **CLEAR**

John Bowker compiles a program of radio broadcasts on a cassette recording for people who are blind.

By **KAREN L. JACOB**  
Staff Writer

John Bowker first began hearing faraway voices from his rural Vermont home.

As an eighth-grader laid up from an illness, he tuned in to late night radio broadcasts.

"I had a thrill listening to St. Louis or El Paso — all these places I knew I would never get," he said.

He was a novice then at tracking DX, a radio term for distant reception, said Bowker. But his hobby of dialing in AM radio stations later led to a career.

He has been all over the country, coast to coast, traveling with his wife, Linda. From his Sun City Center home, Bowker, 69, still pursues his passion for broadcasting.

While a freshman at Middlebury College in Vermont, he completed the first of five radio stations he would build.

"We're putting together a 50-year retrospective of the radio station that I put on the air when I was an undergrad-



This photo, taken in 1971 at Tennessee State University in Nashville, shows Bowker installing equipment for a student radio station.

uate there," said Bowker.

That was May 1, 1949.

"It became the largest club on campus."

With his background in electronics, he later worked for RCA Corp. on securing broadcast and satellite licenses from the Federal Commu-

nications Commission.

Two of those five stations are still on the air today. One was a student radio station he built at Tennessee State University in 1971 while working for RCA.

"All the equipment then

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## RADIO

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was hand built," said Bowker. "That was part of the fun of it."

He also has an extensive collection of radio station breaks he has recorded since 1970. It began with a jingle he heard on "Music Radio WLS Chicago."

So far, Bowker's audiocassette tapes contain the recordings of 12,749 station breaks, with their call letters and location.

"Linda and I have now driven within 35 miles of every

station in the United States," said Bowker. "We just finished that this past summer in Maine."

From 540 up through 1700 on the AM dial, he has recorded each of the 117 channels. Some of those channels have more than 170 stations scattered throughout the country. There are more than 5,000 stations now.

Bowker said Larry King and David Letterman both have the same model RCA microphone he uses.

For the past 14 years, he has shared his recordings through the DX Audio Ser-

vice. The monthly cassette magazine was started for visually impaired people who can't read the printed version of "DX News," published by the National Radio Club.

"We edit everything digitally now," he said. "It's all done on the computer."

As one of the editors for the club's cassette service, he prepares a 15-minute segment called "Travellog," which has 25 to 30 of his station breaks, along with narration by Bowker.

"It's going to take us 13 and a half years to go all the way up the dial," he said.

This year, the DX Audio Service will celebrate its 15-year anniversary in Lima, Ohio, where Fred Vobbe started the project.

The National Radio Club was founded in 1933 and has more than 700 members, including people from Canada, Australia, Finland and Ecuador.

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Some DXers tune in from thousands of miles away. One member in Scotland listens to a Fort Pierce station in Florida that's 4,093 miles away.

Another in New South Wales in Australia logs in frequencies as far away as Berkeley, Calif., at a distance of 7,282 miles.

"AM radio at night can be pretty darned interesting," said Bowker. "At night the AM signals carry a great distance. They can carry around the world."

Bowker also was the first voice heard over the 24-hour hotline he created a few years ago with news and updates about events in Sun City Center. CAMIL, the Community Association Members' Information Line, keeps residents informed about meetings, results of elections and other community activities.

Bowker also is the historian of the Amateur Radio Club in Sun City Center.

After RCA was sold to General Electric Co. in 1987, he taught communications courses at Mercer County College for four years. The classes included maintaining equipment, setting up a broadcast station and the art of broadcasting.

One term he spent teaching inmates at Rahway State Prison, a maximum-security prison in New Jersey. On the weekends, he was an announcer for the morning show on WHWH in Princeton, N.J., from 1976 to 1979. He also did a big band show from Trenton.

"Going on the air is a real kick," he said.

A subscription to the DX Audio Service is \$25 a year and includes the cassettes and postage. The National Radio Club is a nonprofit organization and staffed by volunteers.

The club's Web page is <http://www.nrcdxas.org>.