South African Radio League

Amateur Radio Hall of Fame

Al Akers, ZS2U

Inducted in 2022

Al Akers, ZS2U joined the Port Elizabeth Branch of the SARL in March 1948 and was first licensed on 2 September 1948. Today at over 90 years of age, Al is still very active in the hobby and does a slot in the PEARS weekly news bulletin. Al is a regular at PEARS meetings when his health allows him to attend. During his time with the PE Branch, Al served on the committee, as Chairman and gave RAE classes.

Al enjoyed working field stations, building antennas, and working dx. Al has worked over 300 countries and still has a passion for all things radio. Keen on DF hunts, Al started the Algoa Radio Club with a focus on DF hunts. This club grew under his leadership and eventually rivalled the membership of the PE Branch. On a trip to Cape Town, he happened to chat to Koos and Annie van der Merwe, who encouraged him to convert the club into a branch of the SARL and so the Algoa Branch of the SARL was created.

Following negotiations with Marge Weller, then chairman of the Port Elizabeth Branch, the two branches merged into what is today the Port Elizabeth Amateur Radio Society (PEARS). Al has served on the committee of the PEARS and has also held the office of chairman.

Many of the older amateurs active today, started out under the tutorage of Al Akers. A fitting tribute to the impact Al has had on the amateur community in Port Elizabeth is illustrated by the fact that when Al stepped down as the Director of HAMNET in the Eastern Cape, he was replaced by one of his RAE students.

Al was part of the team to operate from Bird Island (IOTA AF-079.) This was in February 1998 with other team members Lambert le Doux, ZS2LL, Bud Voortman, ZS1B (SK), Hans Potgieter, ZS6ALJ (now ZS1ALJ) and Barry Fletcher, ZS1FJ where 3 042 contacts were made.

Al held the call sign S42U for the Ciskei and frequently operate from there. He also assisted Dave Church, WA2HZR on multiple expeditions in the early 1980s. Through his radio activities, Al brought worldwide attention to this area and to the Wild Coast in general.

Al started out as an electrician, later moved to the SABC, and finally ended up at the University of Port Elizabeth. During his time at UPE, Al worked with Dr Lochner of the Oceanographic Research Institute.

The project that most stands out for Al was a project to track penguins around Algoa Bay – from St Croix Island to Cape Recife. Al was tasked with designing and building the radio transmitters and antennas. The design restraints for the transmitters included a weight limitation of 6% of the body weight and a diving depth of over 200 m. The receive antenna was installed on the first floor of the UPE Main building.

In 1975, Al received the Jack Twine Merit Award and in 2006, Honorary Life Membership of the SARL was bestowed on Al Akers.