



ARES/RACES HTML/JavaScript Membership Database

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ARES and RACES have a need for membership databases. I have seen databases maintained in all sorts of programs, from straight ASCII files to spreadsheet programs and full-blown database management systems (DBMS).

All have their advantages and disadvantages. I have worked with and developed a number of different DBMS, from simple ASCII files to relational DBMSs such as ORACLE. I designed the database, developed, and wrote a C-based user interface for the National Corrosion Database (NCD-developed in ORACLE and using their QSL-C tools)

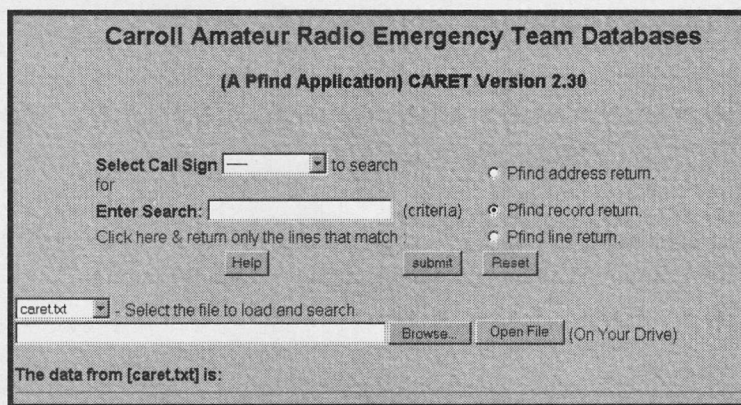


Figure 1: The main database interface.

when I worked for NACE International in conjunction with the NACE-NIST Corrosion Data Center.

I have been rather disappointed with the cumbersome nature and size of RDBMSs and I have come to the conclusion that many databases need not be in such systems. When I was asked to develop an ARES/RACES Membership Database (ARMD) around 1994, I

felt that ease of use and completely free software were the most important issues; free software being top priority.

In 1983-1984 I developed a search engine and a design to use "standard" ASCII files as database files. When the ASCII file is arranged in a predetermined way, this search engine could return all, or part of, the data in a database record when given the

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search criteria. At that time, it was a DOS command-line-based program. I found that ten years later, in 1994, many people no longer liked to use DOS command-line-based programs. So I wrote a C-base menu program to help with the user interface but it was not used very much.

While all members of our local ARES/RACES organization received a free copy of the DB and the software and were offered classes on the system, no one really knew the power of, or even how to use, the "Pfind"© search engine.

While playing with the new level 1 DOM (Document Object Module) and DHTML early in 2002, I made an intuitive leap from being able to read an HTML file's innerHTML to being able to read any HTML file's innerHTML. Once that leap was made, it became a matter of experimentation to come up with the best form of the "HTML" file to be read so that we could use it as a database. Now, I could see a way of using my Pfind technology (developed in 1983/4 and in C), re-written in JavaScript and HTML.

The really big advantage of this "new" system is that it uses something everyone knows how to use: an Internet browser. It also uses my old-standard Pfind ASCII database file. While I could have designed a fully-blown database file structure and used classes and methods to operate on the data, I felt

that I simply did not have the time for such an endeavor.

Also, for the kind of information we want to save and retrieve, the Pfind structure still works very well. After all, the data has not changed very much. I found that I was able to put HTML anchors in the DB file to look up people by call sign and I was also able to put in the HTML code needed to show photos of members, all in a Pfind-type ASCII database file.

I implemented a simple version of the Pfind key-word searching feature and I allowed the returning of the found data in three ways. The program can return either the full database record, just the names and address lines, or just the line of interest. All of these returns have their uses. (see figure 1)

As a final and brief over-view I will say that if we search and return full-records of people who have emergency field capability on 20 Meters we can call them up and ask them to get ready to help out. If we return just the e-mail addresses we can, with a little judicious cutting and pasting, create an e-mail list to tell people it's time to renew their ARES/RACES membership and last, if we return only the address lines they can be used, again with some cutting and pasting, with other standard Windows software to create a mailing list.

The county can use the software, at the site of the emergency, to positively

identify a Ham as s/he checks in for duty since a photo can be attached to the DB record and returned during the search.

I hope this has piqued your interest, and if so, you can browse the **Worldradio** web site for a much more detailed explanation of how to set up a database, how to do searches in the database, and how to use the results of the database.

— For more information, see the extended feature at www.wr6wr.com or contact Phil Karras, ke3fl@arrl.net.

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