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Wood, Washington radio operators Ham it up for Field Day

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Larry Dale of the Parkersburg Amateur Radio Klub that set up at the cabin at Fort Boreman Park during the American Radio Relay League Field Day on Sunday. Amateur radio operators nationwide participated to show their preparedness in the event of an emergency. Operators made contacts across the country and Canada to show how communications would work when phone lines, internet and cell service are interrupted. (Photo by Brett Dunlap)

PARKERSBURG — Area amateur radio operators took to the airwaves this weekend to show what they can do to keep communications going in times of emergencies during the annual American Radio Relay League Field Day.

Ham operators in Wood and Washington counties set up sites with public displays of equipment, antennas and alternate power sources from 2 p.m. Saturday to 2 p.m. Sunday. Operators made contact with other operators around the nation in a test of their systems and to show off the hobby of amateur radio.

The Parkersburg Amateur Radio Klub set up stations at Fort Boreman Park at the cabin near and on top of the hill where the flagpole is located. Operators used the flagpole as an antenna.

Wood County Emergency Communications set up at Henderson Farm in Walker.

The Marietta Amateur Radio Club was set up at its building on Hartline Road near Stanleyville.



A mobile radio communications tent was set up by the Parkersburg Amateur Radio Klub at the top of Fort Boreman Park where the flagpole was used as an antenna during the American Radio Relay League Field Day on Saturday and Sunday. (Photo by Brett Dunlap)

“It is an exercise in emergency preparedness,” said Larry Dale of the Parkersburg Amateur Radio Klub. “It is fun. We experiment with the radios and make sure they are working.”

“The real exercise is for us to be ready in the event of an emergency to use our skills and equipment to provide backup or sole communications.”

The club made more than 545 contacts in the United States and Canada throughout the event, including in New Hampshire, Wyoming, California, Ari-

zona, eastern Washington and Montana, among other states, Dale said.

Radios, antennas and other equipment were set up in a short amount of time and quickly started communicating. Systems were operated by gasoline powered generators.

Operators and clubs also have a point system that helps determine what the clubs have available to them, their preparedness and other facets of operating the way they did this weekend and gauge local interest.



A radio operator with Wood County Emergency Communications communicates with operators around the country from a mobile broadcasting area at Henderson Farm in Walker on Saturday and Sunday during the American Radio Relay League Field Day. (Photo Provided)

The event allowed everyone to set up and start broadcasting quickly, which might be needed if other means of communications are down, Dale said. Amateur radio was utilized following recent flooding in Ohio County, he said.

“It doesn’t take long to realize how significant being prepared is,” he said. “This is an exercise in being prepared.”

West Virginia is a sought-after state for radio operators to make contact with because of the state's small size, Dale said.

"They like to hear from us," he said.

Making contact with operators in Wirt County is considered the "crown jewel" for those who want to make contact with all 55 counties, Dale said.



Wood County Emergency Communications established a mobile staging area at Henderson Farm in Walker to show how communications can be set up in an emergency. The group ran its broadcasts on solar power, using solar panels to keep radios charged and ready. (Photo Provided)

The club held a dinner at Fort Boreman Saturday evening with around 50 people attending.

Lowell Mayor David Hanes, who was at Fort Boreman and a radio operator himself, said these events show the role amateur radio can play in emergency situations. Lowell's emergency plans

have a spot for amateur radio operators to help, he said.

If phone lines and internet go down, radio will be among the best options available to maintain communications and help direct responses and tell people where help is and where people might be able to get needed supplies, Hanes said.

"Radio will get a signal through somewhere," Hanes said. "It always gets through."

Kenny Harris of the Wood County Emergency Communications said it made over 200 contacts nationwide.



Kids communicated with ham operators in the nation during the American Radio Relay League Field Day on Saturday and Sunday. Wood County Emergency Communications established a mobile broadcasting area at Henderson Farm in Walker. (Photo Provided)

“We got most states except Alaska and Hawaii,” he said. “It is tough to get them and we don’t always get them.”

They were operating on a solar battery system. They had panels they set up which charged their batteries which kept them operating throughout the night and into the morning when the sun rose and the panels could start charging batteries again.

Around 30 people from the community attended, with a few able to send messages, Harris said.

“Some of them got on the air for the first time,” Harris said.

Preparation was the focus of the event and learning how to do things better was the aim.



Members of the Marietta Amateur Radio Club Saturday broadcasted from their building on Hartline Road during the American Radio Relay League Field Day on Saturday, an annual exercise to demonstrate the role amateur radio can play in maintaining emergency communications. (Photo Provided)

“We are an emergency communications group so we tried to be prepared,” Harris said. “People are able to see how emergency communications can be set up during disasters where we are not set up in a permanent location.”

It is difficult to get people interested in amateur radio because of the availability of cell phones and the internet, he said.

“If that goes down, they are in the Dark Ages again,” Harris said. “We need to have amateur radio communications.”

Marietta Amateur Radio Club President Richard Miller said it had to call it quits at around 8 p.m. Saturday because of thunder and lightning. The club facility is on top of a hill and there was a risk to their people and equipment, he said.

They made 175-200 contacts, including in California, Washington, southern Texas and South Dakota.

“We could have done more if it wasn’t for the lightning situation,” Miller said. “It is an event with a serious purpose, but it is also a lot of fun.”

The Marietta club ran its systems on gasoline generators. Field Day allows the club to make sure its generators are operational, Miller said.

“This was to show off our preparedness in the event of a major emergency if cell phones and the internet were down,” he said. “We wanted to show our ability to communicate in adverse conditions

when other methods of communications are down for whatever reason.”

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The Marietta Amateur Radio Club was broadcasting Saturday from its building on Hartline Road during the American Radio Relay League Field Day. Due to weather and safety conditions, the club was only able to broadcast until 8 p.m. Saturday. (Photo Provided)

