

Ham Radio Field Day puts Loudoun on the air

Wednesday, Jun. 30 by Rachel Leon



Gordon Miller, of Herndon, assists Christopher Fischer, 9, of Sterling, as Fischer makes contact with another radio operator June 26 during a ham radio event at Dominion High School in Sterling. Times-Mirror Staff Photo/Anna Leon

On June 26 and 27, licensed and amateur ham radio operators braved the blazing sun and 95-degree heat at Park View High School in Sterling to make radio contact with other local and regional ham radio operators.

Ham Radio Field Day is an annual national event that draws thousands of participants each year. It tests radio operations in pseudo-emergency situations. "The whole goal here is to make as many contacts as we possibly can," event coordinator Bud Aiello – call sign W4KSN – said.

The event lasted 24 hours, from 2 p.m. June 26 until 2 p.m. June 27.

Because the event was a study of pseudo-emergency situations, participants had to set up their own antennae and generators for reception and power.

The event featured four types of communication: Morse code, radio teletype, voice, and GOTA, which stands for "get on the air." GOTA is especially designed for amateur or recently licensed ham radio operators to get on the air under the supervision of more experienced ham radio operators.

The messages contained simple information about the location and call sign of the person sending the message.

"People say Morse code is dying. No. That's the original digital code," Kevin Stuart – call sign W4KLS – said. He referenced the 2005 contest on The Tonight Show with Jay Leno, in which Leno invited two teams to compete against each other. One team texted and the other sent Morse code messages to see which team would be faster. The team sending Morse code messages won.

For more information on local ham radio operators, visit qsl.net/sterling. For more information on the national event, visit arrl.org. For other questions, call Aiello at 202-744-7658.