

## WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA SECTION COMMITTEE

For Immediate Release

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**NEWS  
RELEASE**

October 12, 1999

The ARRL, the National Association of Amateur Radio, today announced the creation of the West Central Florida Section. By a 14-0 vote with one member abstaining, the ARRL Board of Directors confirmed the creation of the new Field Services Section following a nearly year long campaign by the West Central Florida Section Committee.

The new Section will begin operations on January 15, 2000, according to Rick Palm, K1CE, ARRL Field Service Manager and Paul Toth, K2SEC, Chairman of the WCF Committee. The new Section will serve over 1,800 members in a nine county area that includes Charlotte, Desoto, Hardee, Highlands, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pinellas, Polk and Sarasota counties.

“We are delighted with the Board’s action”, said Toth. “This is a red-letter day for Amateur Radio in Florida, a day that many Hams have worked very hard to achieve. We will usher in the new Millenium with a new era for our hobby.”

Toth indicated one of the initial goals of the new Section organization will be to draw more people into the ARRL and Ham radio in general. Special emphasis will be placed on educational programs to help individuals get their FCC license and to help licensed Hams stay up to date with new technology. The new Section will also focus on a public communications effort aimed at informing the general public about Amateur Radio and how it benefits the community.

“There is a lot more to Amateur Radio than the shortwave transmissions many people equate with our hobby”, said Toth. “Hams regularly operate on frequencies that range from just above the AM Broadcast band to laser lightwave. We have satellites, GPS still and full motion imaging modes and a lot more at our disposal.”

The new Section will continue to promote Ham Radio’s role of Public Service and Emergency Communications. Amateur Radio operators are often the first communicators on the scene during a disaster. During recent Florida disasters, like Hurricane Andrew and the 1998 Wildfires, Amateur Radio operators provided vital health and welfare communications. Hams also played a vital role during the 1998 Wildfires keeping firefighters in constant contact with other law enforcement and medical teams who operated on different radio frequencies. Hams also man evacuation shelters and provide communications during Hurricanes. And several hundred West Central Florida operators are volunteer severe weather spotters with National Weather Service’s SKYWARN program. The operators receive special training as weather observers and have

the communications tools and skills to help NWS meteorologists protect lives and property through early severe weather warnings to the public. A number of SKYWARN spotters also operate digital weather stations that feed live weather data to the WX4TBW Amateur Radio station located at the NWS office in Ruskin.

WCF Committee members, who led the campaign for the new Section, will meet Saturday, October 16<sup>th</sup>, to vote on a recommendation for the first Section Manager. This is a volunteer position, as are all ARRL Field Services appointments. It is expected the ARRL will announce the Section Manager's appointment in the near future.

For more information about the West Central Florida Section, the ARRL and Amateur Radio in general, contact Paul Toth, K2SEC or Rick Palm, Field Services Manager for the ARRL in Newington, CT.