

Field Day spotlights 'Ham' operators

Picture this: A natural disaster occurs — perhaps the long-dreaded New Madrid Fault earthquake, perhaps a river-hopping tornado gathering wind power as it rushes in from the flatlands to the west and wreaks havoc in Obion County.

The media moves in by means of helicopter, boat or even slow pack mule and provides photos of the ordeal local residents are undergoing. They complete their job of describing the devastation and move on to the next horrific story.

Meanwhile, local phone lines are down. Cell phone communication has been disrupted. What few lines of communication are still functional are so overloaded as to be useless.

Relatives in Gadsden, Ala., or Jackson, Mich., or San Diego are desperate to know if your family is well and whole, but they search in vain for a glimpse

of a loved one's face in the media's coverage, all the while punching buttons on their favorite modes of communication that now refuse to carry the signals.

Where do you turn for help in contacting them? Who will calm their fears that you have suffered or perished? Who will tell them how they can best help you?

That question was answered recently when amateur radio operators in West Tennessee and western Kentucky met for Field Day at Graham Park in Union City. Participants from Obion, Weakley and Dyer counties and Fulton County, Ky., took part in the weekend setup.

At the "practice" event, approximately 1,100 contacts were made as participants tested their own equipment and operator skills in contacting other stations. The 'Ham' volunteers picked up messages originating from across the nation and

in-turn originated messages to other stations throughout the U.S.

Reelfoot Amateur Radio Club president Glenn R. Snow of South Fulton called the field day a "total success," noting that in terms of points earned, the Reelfoot Amateur Radio Club has finished in the top 50 nationwide and in the single digits statewide in recent years' Field Day exercises.

"Since the Department of Homeland Security has been formed, there has been a lot of interest in amateur radio and how it can be used as a national resource," Snow said.

"The Department of Homeland Security was formed after 9/11 and has, since that time, been involved in organizing America for a more effective approach during times of disaster, but

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amateur radio has been around a lot longer than the Department of Homeland Security and its operators have been providing health and welfare and emergency communications services for decades, including the Korean and Viet Nam conflicts. 'Volunteer' is our middle name and 'When all else fails there's amateur radio' is our motto."

Locally, the Reelfoot Amateur Radio Club trains licensed 'Ham' operators for such situations.

Ham operators played a major role following the Hurricane Katrina disaster. Amateur radio operators from around the national traveled to the coast voluntarily, taking their own equipment and personal effects, to provide communications for any function needed.

The local president noted that amateur radio stations have been set up and are operational at Baptist Memorial Hospital-Union City and Volunteer Community Hospital in Martin and that the local group has been working on coordination efforts with Obion County Emergency Management Director Mike George, the Red Cross and the local 911 office.

Earlier last week in what was part of a seven-state emergency exercise to test the ability



'HAM'MING IT UP — Obion County Mayor Bennie McGuire (left) and Reelfoot Amateur Radio Club president Glenn R. Snow of South Fulton took part in the important Field Day for amateur radio "Ham" operators training to assist in times of emergency recently. The weekend event was staged at Union City's Graham Park.

of local authorities to respond to major disastrous situations members of the RARC received and passed exercise messages from Emergency Operations Centers up-line to state officials and, in the case of the Hickman, Ky., area, messages went from Hickman to South Fulton and on to Mayfield, Ky.

Snow said the local amateur radio group also offers courses for those interested in obtaining a license. Testing sessions are also provided by RARC.

For more information, call (731) 479-1971.