

# Clay County is on the air

How amateur radio is making the world a small place

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ORANGE PARK – Members of the Clay County Amateur Radio Emergency Service and the Orange Park Amateur Radio Club recently reached out to the world.

Amateur radio operators turned classrooms into command centers as they hunkered down for its annual National Field Day for ham radio enthusiasts held June 23 at Orange Park High.

"To me it was always a sort of fascinating thing," said Jeff Martin, a guest at the field day. "I've talked to people, the farthest was in the Indian ocean. It's really interesting. I like it as a hobby."

Amateur, or ham radio, is the use of radio frequencies for non-commercial communications.

The objective of the field day, is for ham radio groups to make contact with as many states across the country as possible in 24 hours, all while running on a generator, in

order to simulate an emergency situation.

However, the ultimate goal of the event is to increase public awareness and incite interest in amateur radio. Attendees were able to learn more about the science behind radio operation and learn how to obtain an Federal Communications Commission license to broadcast on their personal radios.

Amateur radio also plays a pivotal role in emergency communications during natural disasters. During Hurricanes Hermine, Matthew and Irma, ARES set up shop in Clay County shelters and were able to provide alternate communication between shelters. In the event of an Emergency Operation Center communication break-down during a storm, ARES can step in as an auxiliary. During some of the most catastrophic disasters of recent years, Clay County amateur radio was able to intercept and help relay messages to first

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Clay County ham radio operators are working hard to interest a new generation of young adults to the field. Radio operators can play a key communications role in times of natural disasters, such as last year's Hurricanes Harvey and Irma.

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responders during Hurricanes Sandy and Harvey.

"The motto is: If all else fails, amateur radio," said Scott Roberts, assistant emergency coordinator and public information officer of Clay County ARES. "We don't want to wait until everything fails, we want to be there to help before that happens."

As the fast-paced age of social media seems to over shadow radio communications, ARES and OPARC are still determined reach the next generation of amateur broadcasters.

"Amateur radio has the reputation of being for your grandpa, and it's not that way anymore, a lot of kids are getting involved," said Roberts. "The older people are starting to pass on, we need to get the younger people involved, so when there is an emergency and there is no communication, we've got radio operators.

According to Roberts, kids as young as 9 in Clay County are involved with the club and have received their FCC license to use ham radios.