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## Amateur radio enthusiasts join national Field Day exercise

By John Clark | Herald Correspondent

Jun 30, 2023

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Cliff Pinkerton works at one of the Cove Repeater Association's communications stations.

John Clark | Herald

About a dozen members of the Copperas Cove Repeater Association amateur radio club were busy last weekend transforming the pavilion at Ogletree Gap into a temporary Emergency Operations Center during the national Amateur Radio Relay League Field Day training exercise.

On the fourth weekend in June, ham radio operators throughout the country set up temporary stations to practice and demonstrate the science and skills involved in maintaining an amateur radio communications network, which may be offered as a free public service during disasters and

emergencies when normal communications are interrupted.

Beginning at 1 p.m. last Saturday, tens of thousands of amateur radio (also known as ham radio) operators went live at temporary EOCs far and wide to test their equipment, set-up, and practice radio skills.

Gary D. Young, Copperas Cove fire chief and emergency management coordinator, was one of the local association members setting up radios, laptops, antennas, generators, solar panels, and other equipment for the 24-hour exercise.

“Our plan is to run for as much of it as we can, so we’ll be here all night,” Young said. “We’re setting up a radio system in an austere environment where we don’t have any (other) communications, and the intent is to try to sustain our operation for 24 hours, if we possibly can. We will talk to as many people as we can over the next 24 hours. We’ll do voice, Morse code, and computer.

“If we can sustain it, we get a certain amount of points and we get ranked with everybody in the nation who is participating.”

Cove resident Budd Johnson, emergency coordinator for Coryell County, has been a ham radio operator since 1966. He has not been involved in a major disaster in this area, but helps distribute information during severe weather conditions, and he was part of the recovery effort in Florida when Hurricane Charley struck there in 2004.

“I always say this is a hobby that is the ultimate contact sport,” Johnson said. “It’s mostly for helping the local communities when disasters happen.”

The 70-member Cove Repeater Association serves an area that includes Coryell, Bell, Burnet, McLennan, and Lampasas counties. According to the group’s brochure, a repeater is “a radio that retransmits a low-level signal, like from a mobile radio or handi-talkie, boosting it to a higher power radio signal. The repeater and antenna are usually in a high-altitude location, such as a mountain top or radio tower. This concept increases the coverage area or footprint of the radio signal.”

Group members enjoy ham radio as a hobby, but there is also a serious side when “Hams” may be called upon to assist various emergency management systems or man radios at a local hospital. They might assist with communications in the field, and many members are trained National Weather Service SKYWARN Spotters.

Bruce Coons, an Army veteran from Copperas Cove, specializes in antenna installation for amateur radio systems. He has been a radio operator for 62 years and says he enjoys being a part of something that helps people in times of need.

“I’ve been in it ever since I was a little kid,” Coons said. “My dad was a radio man in World War II. He taught me Morse code so long ago, I don’t remember learning it. It’s always been there. I took my first radio test in 1961 and got my license. I went to college and became an electrical engineer, and after I graduated, I thought I was going in the Army for two years — ROTC — and somehow I stayed working for the Army for 40 years.”

There are more than 725,000 licensed ham radio operators in the U.S., ranging in age from 5 to 100. For more information about the Cove Repeater Association, send an email to [coverpeaterassociation@gmail.com](mailto:coverpeaterassociation@gmail.com), or go to: <https://k5cra.org>.

To learn more about Field Day, visit [www.arrl.org/what-is-ham-radio](http://www.arrl.org/what-is-ham-radio) and <https://www.arrl.org/field-day>.