

## **Hamming it up**

*Operators convene in De Pere*

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The slogan "Reach out and touch someone" was carried to extremes by the Green Bay Mic and Key Club during the weekend.

The amateur radio club members were busy for 24 hours Saturday and Sunday contacting nearly 2,000 other ham stations through-out the nation during the annual Amateur Radio Field Day at the Brown County Fairgrounds.

Members competed with other clubs, attempting to make as many contacts as possible with other amateur stations from noon to noon Saturday and Sunday.

"It's an exercise in emergency preparedness," said club president Bob Heiser of the nation-wide event. "Should a disaster occur, like a flood or hurricane, amateur operators are called to help assist with information."

He said that when regular communications are disrupted, such as during last year's hurricane in Jamacia and the Mexico City earthquake three years ago, ham operators are used by the government, the Red Cross and emergency officials to help coordinate rescue efforts.

The local group also serves as spotters for the National Weather Service during severe weather, such as during last month's severe storms that caused millions of dollars of damage in Brown County.

Both voice and Morse code were used in the contest. Heiser said that Morse code is a requirement of getting an operator's license.

There are about 70 members in the Green Bay club and about 200 in the area, he said. Another club, the Northeast Wisconsin Radio League, is also based in Green Bay. He estimated there are about 500,000 operators nationwide.

He said conversation during the contest isn't the most exciting, because of the attempt to contact the most stations. Most of the talk deals with the station's call name, where it's from, and what kind of transmitter is being used and the power.

Unlike commercial radio stations, which operate at different wavelengths, hams radios can use as little as 5 watts of power to reach locations throughout the world. Successful contact depends on a number of atmospheric conditions. Heiser said a system can be started up for as little as \$50.

There are 13 satellites, operating exclusively for ham use. Operators use ham systems to play chess, talk to the space shuttles, bounce signals off the moon, test equipment and other experiments.

Heiser said the Mic and Key Club has been in existence since the early 1930's. People interested in joining the club can contact the Red Cross in Green Bay, where the group meets on the second Tuesday of every month.