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Computers taking bite out of hams

Ham radio and computers coexisted at Ashwaubenon show

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For many years, ham radio was the cutting edge of personal electronics. If you were really dedicated, you built your own radio and contacted the world.

But times change. Now, the Internet and World Wide Web are open to anyone with a personal computer, designed to be easy to run.

That's affected the traditional hams, despite ways to draw more people into the hobby. Some of the tougher tests have been eliminated.

There's another sign of the changing times, and it came Sunday at Ashwaubenon High School.

The school's Tech Club has hosted a "Hamfest" for the last two years. This year, the group included computers and other electronic items. "We wanted to throw it open," said the club's Chad Stiles.

It worked; the school gymnasium was filled and the display tables were sold out.

Stiles - callsign N9PAY - said that hams were fading out.

"I guess more people are sitting at home in front of their computers than are sitting in front of their radios," he said.

The two can coexist-some tables sold computer programs for logging radio calls or learning ham operations.

There were also ham radio licence tests, displays of equipment and sales of T-shirts and caps with the hams' call signs printed on them.

But the most interesting tables may have those showing old equipment, being sold and swapped for parts.

They showed the changes especially in the computer industry - old Commodores, Amigas, and Texas Instruments models, now obsolete.

Times change - even for the new stuff.