

# Clayton Cardy travels the world via

# H a m

Before there was the Internet there was ham radio, a technology that hardly is obsolete

By Jessica La Plante  
Door County Advocate

**H**ow did society manage without Internet access? Many Generation Xers find themselves asking that question, much as their baby boomer parents once marveled about the days before television and automobiles.

Wasn't it a small world back then?

Try posing that question to Clayton Cardy, an 87-year-old resident of Sturgeon Bay.

For the past 70 years, Cardy — whose call sign is W9OVO — has been networking with people around the globe on a daily basis, holding "chat sessions" with everyone from the king of Jordan to astronauts and engineers in Houston.

But the World Wide Web didn't truly exist until 1991, you say?

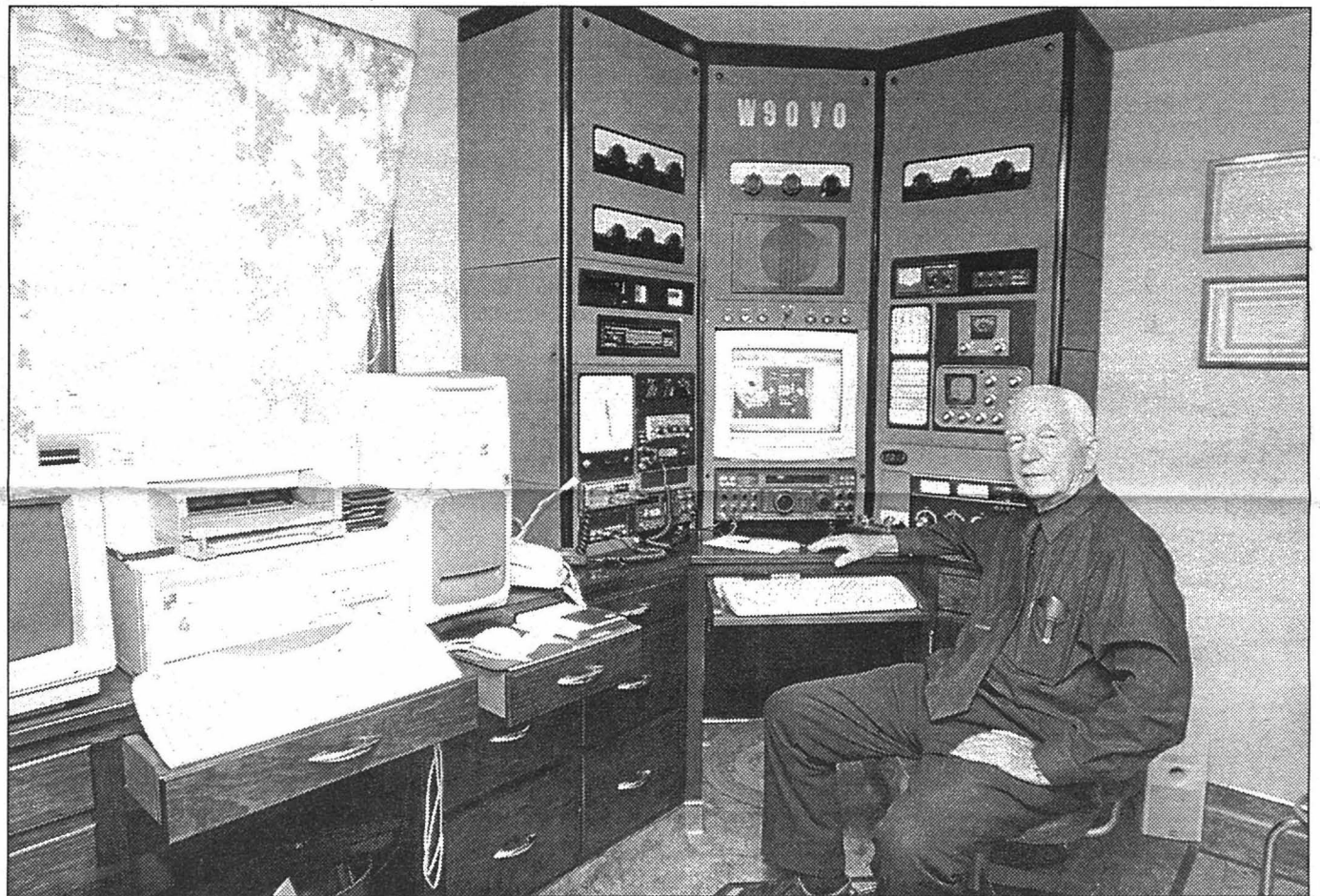
Well, that's a matter of perspective. As Cardy will tell you, the Internet navigated by the technophiles of his day was not a connection of wires and cables, but a network of antennas and transmitters operated by ham radio enthusiasts.

Cardy's fascination with the revolutionary technology began at the age of 5, when he encountered one of the first broadcast radios in Sturgeon Bay during a social visit to a neighbor's house.

Cardy recalls his wonderment over those old gooseneck speakers, vibrating with sounds from the East Coast.

"We heard a little talking and a little music coming through, and that got me (wondering) how can all this be done without wires?" Cardy said.

The transmission was scratchy, but the underlying message was clear: Radio



Christine Nesheim / Door County Advocate

**CLAYTON CARDY SITS** in front of his ham radio equipment. It's not cutting-edge technology, but Cardy has used ham radio to talk to kings and make a difference during emergencies.

## STURGEON BAY

technology was the wave of the future.

While many high-schoolers spent their leisure hours riding bicycles or roller skating, Cardy spent the better part of his youth experimenting with radio technology, a pastime that would eventually take him further than any set of wheels.

By his 17th year, Cardy became a licensed amateur operator, communicating with other hams across the nation via two-way radio.

During his seven decades as a licensed ham, Cardy has remotely visited all regions of the world, using short-wave radio to converse with everyone from for-

eign dignitaries to American celebrities, including the late Sen. Barry Goldwater and famed guitarist Chet Atkins.

As Cardy explains, a dynamic social circle is just one of many perks enjoyed by radio amateurs.

"Where else could you talk to people of that caliber?" Cardy said. "Most of the guys who work at the space center are hams and all of the astronauts are licensed ham radio operators, and we talk to them."

So what does a person say when you've got someone like the king of Jordan on two-way radio?

"You talk about anything you can think of, technical and otherwise," Cardy said.

With its globally diverse appeal, ham

radio allows people to form friendships that transcend social and geographic boundaries, Cardy said.

"We get to know the families of these people; we associate together and get well acquainted," Cardy said. "We're birds of a feather that flock together — that's what it amounts to."

Furthermore, the highly technical nature of the pastime tends to attract a more accomplished crowd, Cardy said.

Since the early 20th century, amateur radio operators distinguished themselves as society's movers and shakers. Many were engineers whose scientific contributions laid the groundwork for modern computer technology.

# HAM: Cardy created technology's rules

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"Everything you've got today — your TVs and radios — have basically been developed by ham radio operators," Cardy said.

In fact, it was the early hams who took mankind's understanding of electronics to new heights, bouncing signals off the moon. As early as 1961, hams began deploying orbital satellites to increase their transmission range.

Today, amateur radio operators continue to uphold their reputation as cutting-edge technophiles.

In fact, Cardy's own ham shack is outfitted with a mixture of digital and electronic apparatus, including computers and modems for transmitting data ranging from text files to graphic images via radio signal.

More than just using that technology for personal enjoy-

ment, most hams regard their amateur radio stations as a community resource, Cardy said.

"When there's a disaster, ham radio's the one (technology people) fall back on, and that's what we're here for," Cardy said. "There's no charge for our services; it's just a hobby."

Harnessing alternative power sources to operate portable equipment, radio amateurs are like modern-day Paul Reveres, delivering vital communications in times of emergency.

Locally, Cardy has been called to duty during snowstorms and tornadoes, relaying messages between first responders, government officials and civilians. On a national level, he has assisted in crises such as California earthquakes and stood by with other members of the Door County Amateur Radio Club after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

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**Clayton Cardy**

In fact, Cardy was among the early hams who helped define the role of amateur radio in emergency communications. Participating on a government task force during the 1950s, Cardy helped create a procedure manual that outlined the use of amateur radio in civil defense

operations.

Today, Cardy continues to be a vocal advocate of ham radio, promoting the social and civic aspects of the hobby as a charter member of the Door County club.

Comprised of nearly 100 year-round and seasonal residents, the Door County ARC is proof that interest in ham radio continues to flourish.

But while the club suffers no lack of membership, Cardy said he has noticed a gradual decline in the number of participating youth, a trend he attributes to Door County's seasonal economy and the rising popularity of computers.

"It's a different generation now — computers have taken over," Cardy said, adding that many Door County youth who do choose a career in electronics migrate to more promising job markets.

Despite the image problem ham radio might suffer as a predecessor to the digital age, Cardy said 9/11 should serve as a reminder that the need for amateur operators is anything but obsolete.

After the attacks, telephone lines were jammed as people tried to check on the welfare of their loved ones, and "ham radio was the only real communication they had," Cardy said. "With portable equipment, we can always bring people up on the air one way or another."

As long as Cardy has been involved, he is not the longest active member of the Door County Amateur Radio Club.

That honor belongs to Clifford Fay, K7BQ of Peoria, Ariz., who has been a licensed radio operator for 82 years. Fay has had a home for many years on Washington Island, where he lives during the summer months.