

LOUDOUN UP CLOSE

Loudoun Times-Mirror

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Radio field day preps for disasters

By SHANNON SOLLINGER
Times-Mirror Staff Writer

The Sterling Park Amateur Radio Club went camping over the weekend.

It's all part of the annual American Radio Relay League Field Day – "hams" all over North America take their gear to the field, string antennas, generate their own power and record every contact they make for a 24-hour period.

SPARC deployed seven antennas and multiple radios in the wilds of the Park View High School playing fields, just west of the football stadium. They reached out into the ether by voice, by

Morse code and by teletype.

It's good practice for the times they are really needed – when a hurricane or tornado fries the phone lines and sizzles the computers.

It's also a lot of fun.

Bill Maylott, of Leesburg, has been with SPARC for 20 years. The field day has changed in some ways, as more and more of the equipment is hooked up to a computer, and they use the rays of the sun to power up the auxiliary battery.

"There are times a radio will get

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HEAR ME NOW:

Bill Maylott, of Leesburg, mans the voice station for the Sterling Park Amateur Radio Club field day at Park View High School Sunday morning.

Times-Mirror Staff
Photo/Shannon Sollinger



KEEPING TRACK: Jeff

Slusher, of Round Hill, dials through frequencies Sunday during the Loudoun Amateur Radio Group 24-hour field exercise at Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve, south of Leesburg.

Times-Mirror Staff
Photo/Abigail Pfeiffer

RADIO

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through when nothing else can," said Maylott. Look at the December tsunami in east Asia. Hams on the Andaman Islands were the sole source of communication for the first days of the disaster. They just happened to be there on a club exercise.

"I find the challenge interesting," said Maylott. "It's a little more of a challenge than just turning on the computer and going to the Internet."

Linda Thomason, a member for seven years, reached out to touch someone at the GOTA – Get On The Air – station, one of the two voice transmitters. She logged more than 100 contacts in two hours Sunday.

There's not much chatting,

said Thomason. She and a voice through the static swap call letters and log in the contact. She and her husband, Russ, started with CB radio and kept at it with amateur radio. Each has an individual call sign.

"It just fascinates me that you can speak into a box on one end and someone hears you on the other end," said Russ. "Through thin air."

Any beginner can use the GOTA, said Maylott, and new-

comers are welcome to try it. A Boy Scout dropped by Saturday afternoon and dialed through a few frequencies. His first contact was in South Africa.

The club made, at first count, 1,354 contacts in the 24 hours that started 2 p.m. Saturday. That's a little better than last year.

For information, contact Gordon Miller (NQ4K), 703-437-8287, or Jim Chappell (AF4MO), 703-437-6379.