

TimesCommunity.com

Your weekly newspaper, daily

06/26/2007

Hams camp out, get ready for disasters

By: Shannon Sollinger

If Hurricane Godzilla roars through the county, knocking out power and leaving cell towers in smithereens, "Who ya gonna call?"

Amateur radio operators can pick up the slack and put the county back in touch with the world and with its own citizens. They're still called hams - a derogatory term from the early days of amateur radio - and they camped out at Park View High School June 23 and 24 for the annual American Radio Relay League Field Day.

"The real purpose," said Jim Purks, of Sterling, "is to make sure we can put up our antennas, use our emergency generators and get on the air."

Purks reported for duty at 10 a.m. Saturday morning with the Sterling park Amateur Radio Club, and was still at work at noon Sunday, checking the airwaves with his VHF station.



Times-Mirror Staff Photo/Elizabeth Dodd Mark Whittington, of Sterling, sets up an antenna to try to contact the International Space Station from Park View High School's playing fields during the June 23-24 Sterling Park Amateur Radio Club Field Day.

Advertisement

The Emmy winner for
"outstanding evening newscast"
is still the
ONLY LOCAL NEWS
that fits your schedule.

9 NEWS NOW
at 7pm
with Derek McGinty

So what are you waiting for?
WUSA9.COM

It's called "hunt and pounce," said Jerry Stueve, (that's "Sierra-Tango-Uniform-Echo-Victor-Echo) - cruising the frequencies to see if anyone answers.

Field Day goes on for a straight 24 hours, all over the United States and its territories. SPARC, N4VA, was on the air from 2 p.m. Saturday to 2 p.m. Sunday.

Purks joined SPARC 10 years ago after reading about a basic licensing course. Now he's hooked.

First of all, it's techie and it's fun. After, that, "I think it's the camaraderie, being able to talk to, make friends with, people all over the world."

Learn Morse Code, Purks said, and the language barriers disappear.

The SPARC enthusiasts kept five radios busy all night, including the GOTO station - easy for a beginner. An 11-year-old girl dropped by, got on the air with the help of member Linda Thomason, and logged in 20 contacts - including Hawaii -- in a half hour.

By 2 p.m. Sunday, the group had recorded nearly 1,400 contacts, and had racked up about 5,700 points (Field Day sponsors award points for contacts, using alternative energy sources and community outreach), up from 5,500 last year.

The hams were not able to reach the International Space Station. There's always next year.

SPARC offers classes and welcomes new members. Call Jim Chappell, 703-437-6379.



BRING MOM CLOSE



©Times Community Newspapers 2007