

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Div. of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

January 2023

MERT's primary role is to support all open Evacuation Shelters throughout Marion County during declared Emergency events. We also support EOC and emergency personnel along with Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) with voice, image and data communications resources. "Call MERT.... When all else fails!"

Please check the calendar for changes to the meetings scheduled the rest of this year. <https://kg4nxx.com/mert-calendar/>

Mark your calendars!

MERT Monthly Meeting

The next Meeting will be on January 21st @ 10:00 am at the MCSO EOC (692 NW 30th Ave, Ocala, FL 34475).

See you there!

Goodbye 2022... and Hello 2023!



Harlan Cook, KN4VRM,
MERT Coordinator

As 2022 comes to an end, I'm thinking back to when it began and saying to myself... "**Boy, that went by fast!**" For me, it was also a year filled with many new experiences, new friendships and some new challenges.

As many often do this time of year, it's also a time to be thankful for the opportunity in giving support to favorite charities and organizations which are trying to make our community and our world a better place for all.

To me, the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT) is one way I can personally "pay it forward" by volunteering my time to help the MCSO during times of major civil emergencies in helping the professional responders help residents, wherever they are.

I acknowledge the outstanding support provided by EM Director Preston Bowlin and his staff of Deputy Director Erin Miller, Emergency Coordinator Chris Kemp, Emergency Coordinator Rob Morris and Secretary Maryanne Davis. Without their constant support, MERT would not maintain its "Mission Ready" status every day of the year.

"The broadest, and maybe the most meaningful definition of volunteering:
Doing more than you have to because you want to, in a cause you consider good." ~Ivan Scheier

Most of all, I thank every past and current MERT member and the friends of MERT for their support during 2022. Our organization is very fortunate to be where it is today by all members efforts in volunteering their time and energy supporting two decades of service to the Marion County Sheriff's Office Division of Emergency Management.

My sincerest thanks to you all for your service and support!



MCSO Recognizes MERT & ARES Amateur Radio Operators at 2022 Awards Ceremony

On Wednesday, December 14th, the Marion County Sheriff's Office recognized MERT Member Pat Davis (KQ4BRW) and ARES Marion County Coordinator Hayden Kaufman (N2HAY) (who was on duty supporting MERT) with special awards for their actions during Hurricane Ian in helping rescue a resident in Ft. Meyers, FL as flood waters forced her onto the roof. Her calls for help was relayed by a relative over amateur radio transmissions received by Hayden and passed on to the EOC while Pat was on duty.



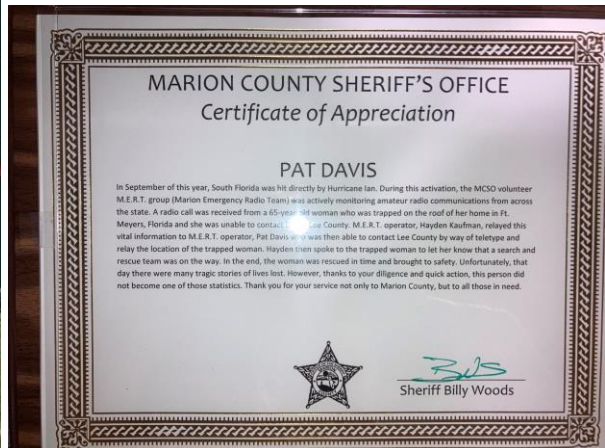
We congratulate Pat and Hayden for following FEMA/NIMS procedures while teamworking to alert officials on the request for emergency SAR support.



(L Photo) Hayden Kaufman, Pat Davis and family along with MERT Members await the start of the Awards Ceremony.



(R Photo) Sheriff Billy Woods Welcomes almost 400 Guest and Award Recipients to the MCSO 2022 Awards Ceremony presentation.



(Top Photos) Sheriff Billy Woods presents "Certificate of Appreciation" to Pat Davis and Hayden Kaufman. (Bottom Photos) It was a very special night of awards and recognition to MCSO Deputies, Employee's and Volunteers. The stories of valor, sacrifice and bravery were emotional and moving. It was a wonderful evening!

NEW MERT Members

MERT is extremely proud in announcing three individuals having meet all MCSO requirements for FEMA/ICS training, attendance and a successful probationary period were awarded their MCSO Division of Emergency Management uniforms during the Dec. 7th "Check In" meeting. **Congratulations to: Pat Davis (KQ4BRW); Gary Neron (KS4TSX) and Gray Moffett (KC3DWY) WELCOME to MERT!**



Pat Davis receives her uniform Gary Neron receives his uniform Gray Moffett receives his uniform Harlan Cook, MERT Coordinator and Bill Gillespie, MERT Assistant Coordinator present uniforms to new Members.

Volunteer Hours Are Extremely Useful and Needed



**Erin Miller, Deputy
Director of the Division
of Emergency
Management, MCSO.**

A special update from Erin Miller:

On an annual basis volunteers assigned to the Marion County Sheriff's Office contribute thousands of hours of service within various areas and divisions of the agency. Through October 2022, Volunteer hours worked within the Marion County Sheriff's Office (including MERT) have contributed approximately \$1,100,000 in saved taxpayers' dollars. Additionally, during a declared local state of emergency, the labor/volunteer hours and resources donated by volunteers and organizations may also help MCSO save taxpayer money by offsetting local costs under FEMA's Public Assistance Program.

For many years, citizens have supported our daily operations by volunteering in various areas of the Agency. The Volunteer Services Coordinator (Robert Ethridge) oversees over 700 volunteers in 34 units including the Citizen Observer Patrol (COPS), Community Patrol, Funeral Escort, Lake Watch, River Watch, Deputy Reserves, Bailiffs, Chaplains, CERT and MERT teams, Clerical and the Foundation Board.

In 2020, volunteers logged 64,830.45 hours, saving the agency and community an estimated \$1.6 million dollars, according to the National Points of Light hourly rate.

Additional information from Kraig Pritts (KA2LHO):

For all MERT Members...

When reporting your "MERT Hours" please include the following:

- Drive time to and from the EOC for all meetings you attend.
- Time at the meetings and events.
- Time at all training events, exercises and HAM shows learning about amateur radio systems, hardware and resources.
- All your time listening and talking on your radio (practicing your skills).
- Time setting up, participating in ALL NET's and then shutting down your system.
- Time reading MERT Newsletters and other materials about Amateur Radio.
- Time spent on adjusting and programming your radios (base, mobile and HT's).
- Time participating preparing, sending and receiving WINLINK messages.



**Kraig Pritts, KA2LHO
MERT
Administration Mgr.**

The hours reported are used as in-kind services for the EOC and Sheriff's Office to obtain grants which provide radios, antennas, supplies and equipment, radio repairs, shirts, etc. and training opportunities for the various volunteer groups. Many MERT Members have taken advantage of those trainings and exercises which are informative and important.

Since I joined in 2016, I know we all have appreciated what we are provided in terms of training and equipment. I believe that no other Sheriff's organization in the state has a similar organization to us.

PLEASE... Report your MERT Volunteer hours each month and include every minute by rounding up on your Amateur Radio activities. This is important for MERT & the MCSO!

The Editor wants to sincerely thank Erin E. Miller, Deputy Director of Emergency Management Division; and Kraig Pritts (KA2LHO) MERT Administration Manager for the above information.

New CERT Liaison Announced

MERT Coordinator Harlan Cook and Assistant Coordinator Bill Gillespie announce the appointment of Stephen Wall (KE6YXF) as MERT's new "CERT Liaison".

Per our "Standard Operating Guidelines" pages 8 & 9, the "CERT Liaison" duties are:

- Assist with coordinating and facilitating positive Interactions between MERT and CERT.
- Coordinate with MERT leaders the timing of and support staffing for CERT specific activities during drills, Rodeo's, Exercises Meetings and actual Activations.
 - The CERT Liaison will meet with the CERT Coordinator to learn when CERT Teams will deploy within their communities, be expecting MERT radio support and when they will deactivate.
- Assist the CERT Coordinator and MERT Training Manager with establishing trainings for CERT Ham Operators.
 - Provide an update to CERT Ham Operators on how to use the ICS-213 and the recommended method of making reports to MERT.
- Participate in CERT Leader meetings in providing MERT - CERT Information supporting the use of amateur radio communications by all CERT Communities.



Stephen Wall (KE6YXF)
MERT's new CERT Liaison

- Attend the MERT Annual Meeting and report on the events and activities of MERT's support to Marion County CERT.

Stephen is also a Certified Instructor with the Marion County CERT and will contribute to MERT's and CERT's future partnership. Please congratulate Stephen when you see him!



Rep. Bill Johnson Introduces Bill to Eliminate Private Land Use Restrictions on Amateur Radio

Congressman Bill Johnson (OH-6) introduced a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives ([H.R.9670](#)) on Thursday, December 22, 2022, to Eliminate private land use restrictions that prohibit, restrict, or impair the ability of an Amateur Radio Operator from operating and installing amateur station antennas on property subject to the control of the Amateur Radio Operator.

The exponential growth of communities subject to private land use restrictions that prohibit both the operation of Amateur Radio and the installation of amateur station antennas has significantly restricted the growth of the Amateur Radio Service. These restrictions have particularly impacted the ability of Amateur Radio to fulfill its statutorily mandated duty of serving as a voluntary noncommercial emergency comm. service.

Thanks to Gary Neron, KS4TSX for sharing this with the Editor. More at ARRL:
<http://www.arrl.org/member-bulletin?issue=2022-12-23>

A Year in Review – 2022

I believe 2022 will be remembered as the year the U.S. was able to push past the “COVID cave”... and began a return to something closer to “normal living” after two long years. From my chair, it resulted from the unprecedented quality of the vaccines and their acceptance by a majority of the population. MERT was able to regain its energy and momentum as well by conducting meetings and training events highlighted by two Hurricane Activations. The following recap is a brief summary of key activities during the year.

January Highlights:

- ✓ Leon Jurcyszyn stepped down as Coordinator but continues his outstanding service to MERT by becoming Technical Advisor.
- ✓ Harlan Cook was appointed Coordinator. Bill Gillespie will continue as Assistant Coordinator.
- ✓ Clint Stockton was named New Member Administrator.
- ✓ New Shelters at North Marion High School and South Ocala Elementary radio facilities designs were completed.
- ✓ MERT personnel completed training on Skywarn and DStar/DRats operations.
- ✓ Weekly MERT-CERT Net's begin for 2022 with emphasis on expanding digital Winlink skills and knowledge.
- ✓ Monthly MERT-CERT-HEC-ARES meetings resume for 2022.
- ✓ MERT personnel attend monthly CERT meetings at several communities in Marion County including Spruce Creek, OTOW, Stone Creek and others.

February Highlights:

- ✓ 4 new MERT membership applications received and vetted by the MCSO.
- ✓ First ever Near Vertical Incidence Skywave (NVIS) Antenna Test conducted with successful contacts made in Gainesville, Jacksonville, Tallahassee, Crestview and Arkansas (KB5OWV).
- ✓ Shelter Audits scheduled and coordinated with MCPS Emergency Coordinator.
- ✓ Installation work at the new North Marion High School Shelter continues
- ✓ MERT creates and presents to the CERT Certification class a "CERT-MERT HAM Reference" document explaining the support MERT provides CERT radio operators.
- ✓ MERT continues participating monthly in the FDEM Region 3/5 Net Exercise.

March Highlights:

- ✓ MERT Annual Meeting conducted with Guest Speakers from MCPS, HEC, ARES.
- ✓ A School Shelter Audit during Spring Break was successful with 8 sites fully tested (1 site was not available) All Passed.
- ✓ New Shelter at North Marion High School was activated and tested. Passed.
- ✓ MERT presented to the CERT Leadership Meeting the "CERT-MERT Reference" document for their review. We appreciated Henri Velthuisen's invitation.
- ✓ MERT has a Membership table at the 2022 Marion County Days on March 26th.

April Highlights:

- ✓ SHREK kits audited and reviewed in advance of the 2022 Hurricane season. A few parts were broken/failed/missing and will be ordered. The stand-alone backup batteries were determined to be years past EOL and need to be replaced.

- ✓ All power supplies with Anderson Power Pole connections may be improperly installed and will need inspection/replacement as required.
- ✓ MERT Member Gray Moffett, KC3DWY, announced as MERT Secretary.
- ✓ Mobile Command Center equipment design effort continued with Bruce Twiss crafting and documenting options for consideration.
- ✓ Sheriff's Appreciation Dinner was attended by several MERT Members.
- ✓ MERT Coordinator Harlan Cook attends the April Hospital Emergency Communications meeting in a Q & A session.

May Highlights:

- ✓ Winlink Training highlighted its many features and capabilities for Amateur Radio uses, especially for MERT and its emergency communications Mission.
- ✓ Members also viewed a very informative video on propagation characteristics for amateur radio bands.
- ✓ Training on the Digimode Automatic Propagation Reporter and Reverse Beacon Network was offered.
- ✓ A discussion on applying for SHARES authorization was held. It was determined to be a useful emergency communications resource and an application will be presented to Preston Bowlin.
- ✓ Proposed new Shelter at South Ocala Elementary was inspected with MCPS Emergency Coordinator and a design was completed.
- ✓ MERT was approved to use the old ballistics shed as a centralized warehouse for all its equipment, cables and batteries. The new facility allows MERT 24x7 access for all immediate deployment events/activations by the MCSO.
- ✓ For the first time, MERT participated in two Shelter Manager Training events held by the Marion County Public Schools (MCPS) to explain who we are and why we are at the Shelters.

June Highlights:

- ✓ MERT receives parts and equipment needed to bring all SHREK kits to fully stocked condition.
- ✓ MERT receives replacement batteries and is now 100% Mission Capable for any deployments to Shelters and other assignments.
- ✓ MERT participates in the CERT Rodeo – report completed and provided .
- ✓ SHARES Application was approved – radios to be upgraded next!
- ✓ Repeater study completed on use of an existing tower in Salt Springs as part of searching for solutions in improving regional EOC communications with other Region 3/5 EOC's.

- ✓ Mobile Command Center design review conducted. Key materials are confirmed but added research needed for mobility and power resources.
- ✓ MERT participates in the Marion County EOC Hurricane Preparation Workshop on June 8th.
- ✓ MERT reviews completed CERT Rodeo report on participation and activities.

July Highlights:

- ✓ WebEOC training provided to MERT.
- ✓ MERT radios sent in for MARS modification kits supporting SHARES operations.
- ✓ Results of Repeater Study using an existing tower in Salt Springs was reviewed by all MERT Members in finding solutions to the regional communications difficulties outside Marion County.
- ✓ Design elements reviewed/changed for the Mobile Command Center equipment recommendation.

August Highlights:

- ✓ Winlink training continues led by Paul Blystone. Excellent job being done.
- ✓ FLDIGI (Fast light digital) software reviewed for applications supporting amateur radio.
- ✓ Guest Elbert Wilkinson (KQ3K) of the Silver Springs Radio Club showed a video of MERT's new RigExpert antenna analyzers' many new functions.
- ✓ MERT submits recommendations for updating the Standard Operating Guidelines to Div. of EM.

September Highlights:

- ✓ Leon Jurcyszyn (K8ZAG) trains MERT on new FCC licensing documentation called "CORES".
- ✓ Training class on testing antennas and cables presented by Harlan using MERT's new Analyzer.
- ✓ A record 42 Winlink test messages were sent/received during the weekly MERT Net.
- ✓ MERT Assistant Coordinator Bill Gillespie travels with MCSO staff to inspect new Mobile Command Center (MCC) in Tampa. Results provided.
- ✓ MERT begins testing of the 4 MCSO Satellite Telephones as part of the monthly FDEM Region 3/5 Net Exercise.
- ✓ Hurricane weather conditions are key focus during weekly "Check In" meetings.
- ✓ A MERT Training "Task Book" idea was discussed in guiding Members through key learning and skill advancements. The idea is fully supported by membership.
- ✓ MERT submits updated "Information" pamphlet recommendations.

October Highlights:

- ✓ MERT is Activated by the MCSO for Hurricane Ian support. 13 Members deploy in support of the School Shelters and the EOC for 20 hours.
- ✓ Two MERT Members support a call for Help from the Ft. Meyers area and supply the report to the Incident Commander who relays the request for SAR support to Lee County. The 65 yrs. old individual was rescued.
- ✓ MERT "Red Book" idea created as guide to MERT Incident Commander use.
- ✓ 38-page Hurricane Ian Incident Report completed and submitted to Div of EM detailing activities and ICS Forms used consistent with FEMA/NIMS training guide.
- ✓ MERT "Task Book" draft submitted and reviewed by Members with recommendations provided.
- ✓ New Winlink record set with 82 messages received and transmitted.

November Highlights:

- ✓ MERT Activated again for Hurricane Nicole support. MERT staffs the EOC for continuous operations for 12 hours.
- ✓ MERT "Red Book" resource was used to guide the MERT IC through the Activation. Additional tasks identified and added to resource.
- ✓ MERT completes and submits 32-page report detailing activities and ICS Forms used consistent with FEMA/NIMS training guidelines.
- ✓ MERT participates at community events for new member drives.
- ✓ MERT "Task Book" draft reviewed by Members.

December Highlights:

- ✓ MERT submits completed "Red Book" IC resource to Preston Bowlin.
- ✓ MERT has table at Silver Springs Radio Club Fall Festival for new Member drive.
- ✓ MERT Member Pat Davis and ARES Member Hayden Kaufman received MCSO Sheriff Awards at annual Awards Ceremony.
- ✓ Three MERT Members successfully completed all training and probation requirements and received Div. of EM uniforms.
- ✓ Leon Jurcyszyn appointed new MERT Training Manager.
- ✓ New CERT Liaison announced to support Marion County CERT growth and training activities.

MERT meetings are open to all interested Amateur radio enthusiast, CERT, ARES, Skywarn members and the General Public who are interested in learning more about participating in this important volunteer Amateur radio organization.

[Interested in learning more about MERT...Visit https://kg4nxx.com/](https://kg4nxx.com/)