

# MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office  
Division of Emergency Management

## COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

January 2024

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!"***

**Mark your calendars!**

**MERT Annual Meeting**

**The next Meeting will be on January 20th @ 10:00**

**See you there!**

### A New Year of Opportunities... learning New Skills!



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)  
MERT Coordinator

I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season. For me, I also took time reflecting how grateful I am to all the MERT Members who made all our 2023 successes possible. Thank you for your time and enthusiasm in contributing to our efforts supporting the Division of Emergency Management in providing well trained and skilled volunteers supporting the Shelters. It was a very busy year but I had a lot of fun and I hope you did too.

Looking forward, we do have some carry-over projects needing attention that will require our collective efforts to complete. They include:

- Moving & adding guy wires to the telescoping pole supporting the OCF HF antenna further from the trees. [In 2023, trimming had a huge improvement in HF comm's!]
- Coordinating access to the remaining schools which haven't been tested in 2 years
- Identifying our MERT budget resources to complete these projects:
  - Replacing the 15-year-old radio repeaters which are no longer repairable
  - Purchasing the radios and accessories for the new MCC
  - Replacing the antenna and adding a repeater to the Marion County Forest Tower providing communications into the Flagler and Volusia EOC's

"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

Looking forward, MERT has many new opportunities to explore! They include:

- Ramping up our renewed training efforts in concert with the new Training Skill Book and New Member Orientation Guide.
  - MERT's new resource was designed to support a self-directed training effort which encourages the responsibility of learning by the Member. This gives each person the opportunity to make every decision when it comes to gaining the knowledge and skills needed for MERT membership and advanced leadership positions.
- Conducting more practice exercises & field events supporting our training focus:
  - New monthly 2 Meter "simplex" Net's practicing radio communications without using repeater access (perhaps on Saturday mornings?)
  - MERT 20 full EOC radio operations exercise for local, national and international communications practice using every radio MERT has
  - Remote radio exercise(s) allowing members experience with establishing emergency communications setup, operations and trouble-shooting throughout Marion County
  - Supporting the Division of Emergency Management CERT Rodeo
  - New Mobile Command Center (MCC) exercise(s) providing members training on setup and operation
  - Joint Exercises with other Marion County Emergency Communications (EMCOMM) organizations (CERT, ARES & HEC)
  - Expanded monthly FDEM Region 3, 4 and 5 exercises to include 2 Meter operations (when Forest Tower is activated)

I hope everyone can participate in all these 2024 activities because I know MERT will be a better skilled and more knowledgeable organization... **supporting those who need our help...** when emergencies arise.

Of course, I invite all MERT members to say thanks to Director Preston Bowlin, Deputy Director Erin Miller and their staff for the outstanding support provided in 2023!

**My sincere thanks to all for your wonderful support and dedication to our Mission!**



### **MERT Annual Meeting on January 20th**

All hams and the public are invited to attend the Annual Meeting on Saturday, Jan. 20<sup>th</sup>. We will have several Guest Speakers sharing timely information with everyone.

## 2023 Hamfest Update

The 2023 edition of the Silver Springs Hamfest was fun to attend! We met many new visitors stopping by our booth as well as many good friends from MERT and other Marion County Amateur radio organizations.

MERT received two applications and eight email addresses requesting more information.

MERT sincerely thanks the Silver Springs Radio Club (SSRC) for a public service table allowing us to distribute our new brochure and answer questions from visitors.

**1<sup>st</sup> Row:** MERT Coordinator Harlan Cook, Member Gary Nichols and wife Christina manning the MERT booth. Member Mike Condon and a visitor to our booth.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Row:** MERT Members Gray Moffett, Sharon Malik and Dee Seagraves. MERT Member Phil Lewis purchasing radio parts.



**3rd Row:** Hamfest main room and MERT Member Sally Gugino with her new Rig Expert tester.

**Not Included:** MERT Members Bill Gillespie and Dave Gustafson.



**MERT's new Information brochure. We thank Darian Tucker, Administrative Assistant with the Division of Emergency Management for sharing it with MERT.**

## MERT Information Brochure Updated

MERT is pleased sharing our information brochure has been updated by the staff at the Marion County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) Public Information Office (PIO).

The new look captures who we are and what we do in a refreshing new way. Please take a few the next time you're at the radio room to handout to other hams!



## Human Trafficking – A National Challenge

Division of Emergency Management Director Preston Bowlin invited MERT Members to attend the iEmpathise presentation for First Responders – “Human Trafficking Prevention Program” on Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> at the College of Central Florida. It was an impactful and thought provoking review of this terrible crime upon children, women and men.

By definition, human trafficking involves the use of force fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act. Every year, thousands of men, women and children are trafficked nationally across the U.S. The problem is even more rampant worldwide.

A major message was, if you see something not right, report it to the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888. If you have the opportunity to attend in the future, you will learn much and greatly benefit from the experience.

**HALE** & **Empathise**  
A National Human Trafficking Resource Center

PRESENT:  
**FIRST RESPONDER • COMMUNITY MEMBER**  
**HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION PROGRAM**

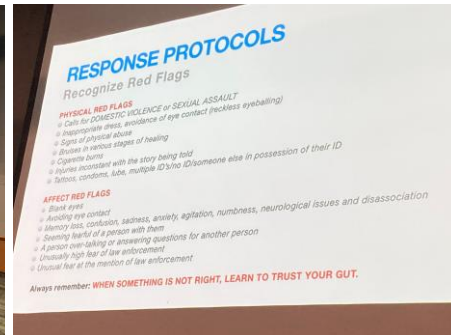
JOIN US FOR AN INVALUABLE FREE EXHIBIT TOUR AND TRAINING SESSION ON HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND RESPOND TO THE SIGNS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN OUR COMMUNITY.

**THE APATHY EFFECT**

COLLEGE OF CENTRAL FL. • KLEIN ROOM • 3001 SW COLLEGE RD, OCALA

	EXHIBIT - SELF GUIDED TOUR	HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION TRAINING			
SUN, DEC 3	2 pm - 5 pm			1 pm	3 pm
MON, DEC 4	10 am - 5 pm	9 am	10 am	1 pm	3 pm
THU, DEC 6	10 am - 5 pm	9 am	10 am	1 pm	3 pm
WED, DEC 6	10 am - 2 pm	9 am	10 am		

Register At: Sponsored By:



(L-R) Course Instructor Las Vegas First Responder Engineer/Medic Matt Driscoll; slide presentation resource; participation Certificate; and Harlan Cook, MERT Coordinator thanking Mike Driscoll, LVFD for his excellent presentation.

## Get your Training Skill Book!

MERT’s new resource was designed to support a self-directed training effort encouraging Members to gain the knowledge and skills needed to complete critical tasks when activated or deployed. Contact Harlan Cook, Bill Gillespie or New Member Manager Pat Davis for a copy.

“When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too.”

Paulo Coelho

## **MERT adopts **MERTrak** Volunteer Time Reporting System**

Effective January 1<sup>st</sup>, **MERTrak** becomes MERT’s official time reporting system. The new system is simple and fast to log your volunteer activities weekly. Access the app via: [mertrak.com](http://mertrak.com). Visit our website [KG4NXO.com](http://KG4NXO.com) “Quick Links” section for more details.

### **Reporting your MERT Volunteer Hours *is very important!***

On an annual basis, volunteers assigned to the Marion County Sheriff’s Office (MCSO) contribute thousands of hours-of-service worth between \$1,500,00 to \$2,000,000 in saved taxpayers’ dollars. During a declared local state of emergency, the volunteer hours and resources by **MERT** and other organizations may also help save taxpayer money by offsetting local costs under FEMA’s Public Assistance Program.

**MERT’s Volunteer time reporting app. MERTrak front page.**

### **What do I report in **MERTrak**\*?**

When reporting your “**MERT Hours**” please include the following:

- Drive time to and from the EOC for all meetings you attend (2 hours maximum total).
- Time at the meetings and events (no limits).
- Time at all training events, exercises and HAM shows learning about amateur radio systems, hardware and resources.
- All time listening and talking on your radio as an FCC licensed radio operator practicing your skills (no limits).
- 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 programming, adjusting and repairing your radios (base, mobile and HT’s).
- Time participating preparing, sending and receiving WINLINK messages.
- Time on the telephone or sending/receiving emails about **MERT** or any other amateur radio activity.

**\*Special Acknowledgement:** **MERT** recognizes **Kraig Pritts (KA2LHO) Administration Mgr.** for his significant time and skillful expertise creating **MERTrak**. *Thank you, Kraig!*

***Interested in learning more about MERT? Visit <https://KG4NXO.com>***