

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

March 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 Monthly Meeting

The next Meeting will be on March 16th @ 10:00 am.

See you there!

Welcoming Spring!



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

Warmer temperatures, longer days, greens in every shade and beautiful flowers - spring is a cause for celebration. Welcoming this new season is about smelling the flowers, literally.

Summer will sneak up on us before we know it, so make sure you take the time to appreciate nature's revival before Florida's heat and humidity returns.

With the warming weather, MERT will be conducting two major exercises in March and April. First will be a remote Field Exercise on March 20th where members will set an emergency communications station at the Price Scrub's State Park in far northern Marion County. Multiple bands will be used along with sending Winlink digital messages. A second team will staff the EOC radio room for the exercise. It should be great fun for all!

The second exercise is scheduled for April 27th at the Emergency Operations Center. It's called MERT20 when we celebrate over 20-years of service to the Division of Emergency Management. This Special Event Station exercise will be using every radio in the communications room (HF on multiple bands, 2 Meter and 70 cm) along with our NVIS HF antenna. Members are welcomed in bringing their personal Go Radios too so plan to attend and sign up for a shift(s) at KG4NXO.com (click the MERT20 tab) or MERT20.org.

"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

I also want to thank all the members for the enthusiastic support of the new “Training Skill Book and New Member Orientation Guide”. Classes have been provided on several topics and a detailed plan has been put together for many more by Pat Davis and Leon Jurczynyn that I know everyone will enjoy participating in. Classes are conducted each Wednesday and special classes will occur on Saturday mornings in March. Look for more details soon.

Contact me if you haven't signed up for the March 29th Volunteer Appreciation Dinner. See you at a meeting, training class or field exercise soon!

HR Cook



MERT needs YOU!

MERT Secretary Position Open

We sincerely thank Gray Moffett (KC3DWY) for being our Secretary, the last 2 years. Gray's support included conducting our “MERT Annual Meeting Report” and the report of MERT Highlights of 2022 and 2023.



**Gray Moffett
KC3DWY**

What does the Secretary do? The Secretary completes an annual report of the MERT activity highlights and conducts the Annual Meeting. If you can help for 5 hours **per year**, please let the MERT Coordinator or Assistant Coordinator know you can help!

Thank You Gray for your great support and being our Secretary the last two years!

¿Nos puedes ayudar?

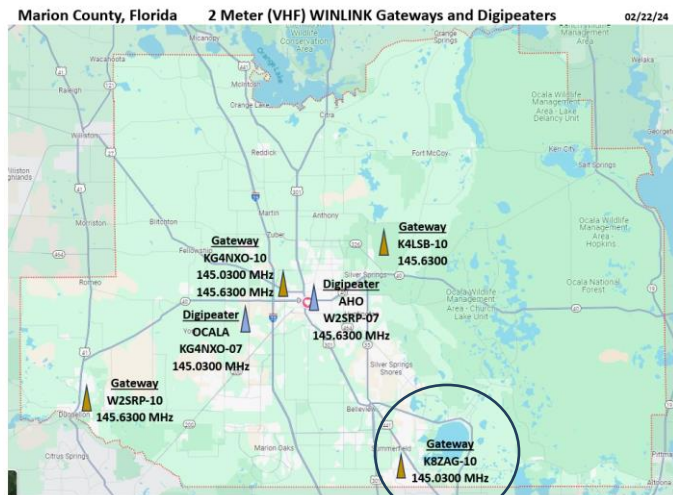
Can you help translate our updated MERT Information Brochure into a Spanish language format? If so, contact Harlan or Bill.

MERTrak Volunteer Time Reporting System

Thank you for documenting your volunteer hours weekly at **mertrak.com**. Your weekly volunteer hours can include all amateur radio on-air time, setup and testing time, repairs, reading the MERT newsletter and other ham radio materials, meeting and field exercise time along with your time getting to and back home from all MERT activities. It also includes preparing for your first license and an upgraded FCC license!

New Marion County WINLINK Gateway ON AIR

Leon Jurcyszyn K8ZAG activated a new WINLINK Gateway at his residence in the Villages last month and invites all Hams sending Winlink messages to test their radios with his station on 145.0300 MHz. If you can't reach it, use MERT's digipeater "OCALA" (KG4NXO-07) at 145.0300 MHz. Visit MERT's website KG4NXO.com, click the WINLINK tab then the "MERT WINLINK LOCAL MAP" for a copy.



A new Marion County WINLINK Gateway and Digipeater map is now available on KG4NXO.com. Click the WINLINK tab for a copy.



New Administration Manager and current New Member Manager - Pat Davis (KQ4BRW).

Pat Davis - New Administration Manager

MERT Coordinator Harlan Cook announces Pat Davis (KQ4BRW) has volunteered to become the new Administration Manager. Pat joined MERT in 2022 and is a former teacher and IT professional with the Marion County Public Schools where she completed many significant and important projects enhancing the resources and support for teachers and administrators.

Pat became interested in community emergency preparations and completed the CERT certification class where she learned about MERT. Shortly afterwards, she received her FCC Technician license, joined MERT and soon passed the General license. Pat is also owner of a very successful and active business supporting the equine industry.

Pat has Activated twice (2022 – Hurricane Ian and 2023 - Hurricane Idalia). Pat also received a MCSO Division of Emergency Management Achievement Award for her actions during Hurricane Ian in helping save the life of a person in Lee County.

Please congratulate and thank Pat for her past and future contributions supporting MERT. **Thank You Pat!**

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

Paulo Coelho

Get your Training Skill Book

MERT's new resource helps members gain the knowledge and skills needed to complete critical tasks when activated... and at their own pace! Our original supply of 24 binders has now been restocked so see Pat Davis, Harlan Cook or Bill Gillespie for your copy.



Thank You Kraig Pritts!

MERT sincerely thanks Kraig Pritts (KA2LHO) for his major contributions since 2019 as our immediate past Administration Manager. His contributions have been numerous, varied and creative over the years but three really stand out.

- His creation of an amazing Member database to help document volunteer details, developments and accomplishments is especially noteworthy. Accomplishment logs are records that track your achievements over time which are especially important for volunteer organizations like MERT having complex requirements for membership.
- **MERTrak** is a special time and activity documentation resource supporting MERT's ability to report each volunteers' activities in detail should the Division of Emergency Management require it for FEMA reimbursements. As a specialty volunteer organization, our time is uniquely related to AUXCOMM and EMCOMM events.
- MERT20 is a unique Special Event Exercise encouraging every MERT member to learn and participate in activities they may or may not do on a regular basis. The opportunity to spend significant time practicing on-air communications time over multiple bands is not a usual event by amateur radio operators... but it is during MERT20! Have you talked with other hams in 7 countries and 24 states?
 - MERT20 also encourages members to become familiar with all the radios provided by the Division of Emergency Management in the EOC radio room. While some are not used by members at their residence, future activations require MERT volunteers at least be familiar with the basic operation and adjustments of each radio unit;
 - The extended operations over the 12-hour timeframe introduces members to the probable schedule of Shelter support assignments.

I'm happy sharing that Kraig is remaining a member but he is going to enjoy a new perspective (and change of view) in his very hectic personal life. When you see Kraig, please thank him for his many wonderful contributions helping the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT) advance and reach new heights!

From everyone at MERT... Thank You Kraig!



MERT Administration



CERT Rodeo



Hurricane Nicole



Community presentation

FEMA ICS-214 General Message Practice

I hope everyone enjoyed the radio ICS-213 message practice class. Thanks go to Gray Moffett (KC3DWY) for leading the class which will return regularly this year.



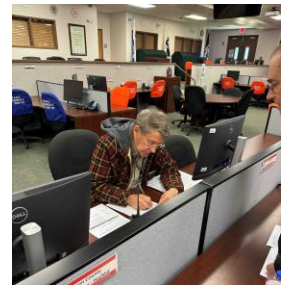
ICS-213 Training



Gary Neron sending a message



Bill Davis & Bruce Twiss reviewing the message received



Bill Davis receiving a new message



Sharon Malik & Gray Moffett setting up the radio



Reviewing the results



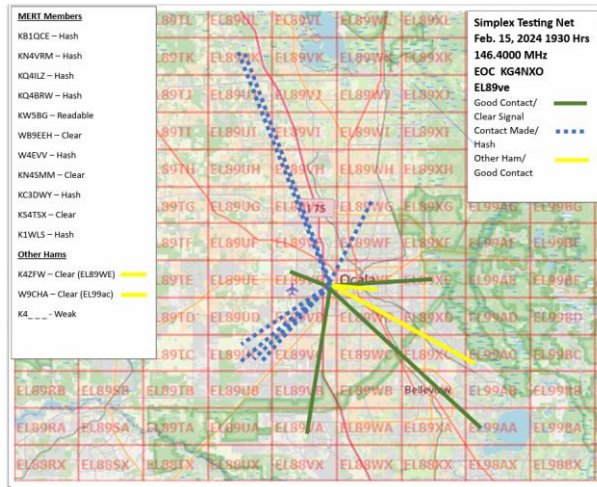
Nick Kiddey & Mike Condon sending a message



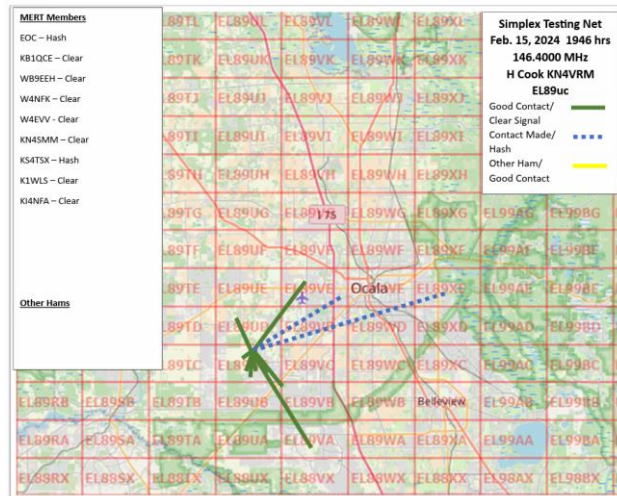
Rene Perron & Kathy Oxendine waiting for a new message

Simplex Testing Underway

Our Simplex Test Net has started and the results of the first two week are in.



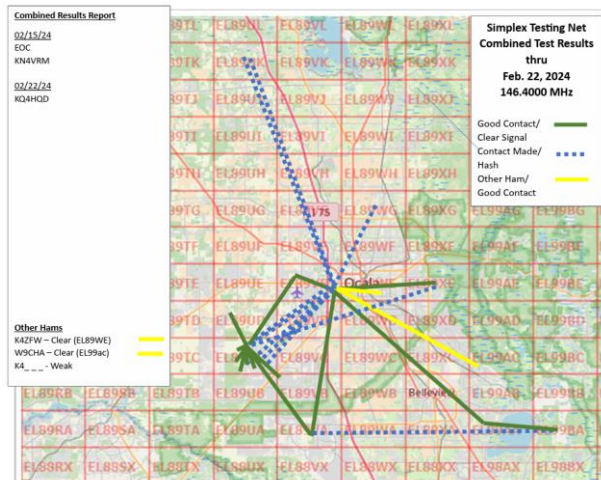
EOC Simplex results from 2-15-24 shows a diverse contact field with good to moderate distances.



Test results for KN4VRM showed a mixed bag of contacts. Harlan shares he was surprised over the limited range that his radio/antenna system performed but is glad to learn the facts.



Test results for KQ4HQD from far SE Marion County appears as predicted. Note: A few Members living in the SE were unable to join the Net on that date.



The combined Simplex Net results map as of Feb. 22nd shows some potential relay Operators.

New Communications Building

The new communications hut at the Sheriff's Office Complex has been placed and is going through the final steps of construction. MERT will be moving our repeaters over when it is completed. This site has KG4NXO (2 Meter & 70 cm) and the Winlink Gateways (145.030 and 145.630 MHz).



Upcoming Special Events

Let's have some FUN! Mark your calendars for these special events:

Field Exercise - North Marion County

On **Wednesday, March 20th**, MERT will have its first 2024 Field Exercise testing our ability to set up and complete emergency communications from the north County line at the Price Scrubs State Park (17930 NW Hwy 320, Micanopy, FL). The Exercise will be led by Bill & Pat Davis. Members should be on site by 9:00 am. A second team will be at the EOC to conduct the tests.

MERT MEMBERS

On March 20th, MERT will conduct a Field Exercise at Price's Scrub State Park in northwest Marion County at 17930 NW Hwy 320, Micanopy, FL 32667.



MERT 20 Special Event Exercise

Saturday, April 27th – 8:00 am to 8:00 PM
Have you signed up for MERT20 yet? If not, visit MERT20.org or KG4NXO.com and click the MERT20 tab and pick your shift. Following up on last year's very successful event when members made contact with other amateur radio operators in 7 countries and 24 U.S. states, MERT will do it again April 27th. This exercise event celebrates 20 years of MERT service to the Division of Emergency Management.

MERT20 Special Event Station-2024 KG4NXO



Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT)

April 27, 2024 (1200 UTC) - (0000 UTC) April 28, 2024

Home About MERT Frequencies Schedule Certificate MERT Member Sign-Up

Welcome to the 2024 edition of the MERT20 Special Event website celebrating more than two decades of the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT) service to the Marion County (FL) Sheriff's Office. We are extremely proud of our service providing emergency communications service to the Division of Emergency Management.

MERT has a well equipped radio room embedded in the Emergency Operations Center with operating capabilities on FM, SSB, CW and digital modes. There are several MERT FM and D-Star repeaters throughout the county to maximize our capabilities when called into service.

When shelters are opened during declared emergency situations, MERT members deploy to these shelters as well as off site emergency locations to support communications back to the Sheriff's Emergency operations Center.

All members are FCC licensed Amateur Radio Operators who have completed FEMA/NIMS and Incident Command System (ICS) training. Every member has also been fully vetted /background checked through the Sheriff's Department. We stand ready to serve during critical events including hurricanes, tornados and other emergency events as requested by the Director of Emergency Management.

Thank you for your interest and participation in our 2024 MERT20 Special Event operation. Look around this site to sign-up and operate (MERT members only), see a sample of the 2024 certificate and how to receive one via email, how to find us on the air and the various frequencies/modes we will be using to help you be a part of our celebration.

We look forward to meeting you on the air!

[Click here for more details about MERT!](#)

Volunteer Leaders Meeting

Harlan and Bill attended the Volunteer Leaders Meeting hosted by the MCSO Volunteer Services Coordinator, Robert Ethridge, on Feb. 15th. Rob shared there are now 30 Marion County groups with 1375 total volunteers. Rob also shared there are numerous volunteer opportunities available and encouraged all leaders to spread the word.

MCSO Volunteer Appreciation Dinner is March 29th – RSVP required. Contact Harlan asap if you want to attend.



(L-R) Lt. Paul Bloom, Bill Gillespie, Robert Ethridge and Harlan Cook.

MERT Members support the Florida Sheriff's Youth Ranch Fundraiser Rodeo



Doing good has no boundaries!

On Feb. 24th, three MERT Members joined MCSO officials and other Marion County CERT Members in supporting the Florida Sheriff's Youth Ranch Fundraiser Rodeo.

MERT Members Kraig Pritts (KA2LHO), Pat Davis (KQ4BRW) and Bill Davis (KQ4ILZ) assisted with traffic control.



The Sheriff's Youth Ranch (placement is a voluntary decision) is where young people get another chance at life.

Florida Sheriff's Youth Ranch Fundraiser Rodeo.

(Top) Kraig Pritts directing traffic.

(Middle) A Mobile Command Center (MCC) from another Florida County on display.



(Bottom) A view of the stock pens and pavilion at the Youth Ranch.

MERT salutes these Members who volunteered their time for this important event!

Wow - How neat is this!

"We needed a mobile radio unit for our CERT/MERT activities. This one is all-terrain and can go over fallen trees, through flooded streets, and runs on treats. Radios, batteries, and spare cords can fit in some saddle bags. During the last storm our truck couldn't get around the neighborhoods because of fallen trees... and this may be the solution!

The plan is to put the antenna on the highest point, by drilling a hole through the top of the hard hat and putting the mobile antenna up through it. We ran into difficulties when the hubby... chickened out... doing a test ride while I push the transmit button. He's concerned about RF or something buzzing between Wiley's ears and our mobile unit going.... berserk! We are now working on some alternative designs.

Over and out from the north team." *Can you guess who?*

Learn more about MERT at..... KG4NXO.com



Wiley models the new MERT "Mobile Radio Unit" design. Testing has been delayed though!