

# MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office  
Division of Emergency Management

## COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

December 2024/January 2025

MERT's primary role is to support all open Evacuation Shelters throughout Marion County during declared Emergency events. We also support the Emergency Operations Center IC and other EMCOMM groups (CERT, HEC, ARES) with voice, image and data communications resources.

***"Call MERT... When all else fails!"***

EMCOMM Monthly Meeting

The January 18<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 am.

All Amateur Radio Operators are Welcomed!

### Another Year for the Record Books!



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)  
MERT Coordinator

As 2024 comes to close, MERT completes its 20<sup>th</sup> year of operations supporting the Division of Emergency Management. All current and former Members should be extremely proud of our collective contributions over the last two decades in making a positive impact on the operations and success of this important governmental agency.

In researching our history, I've learned that Marion County experienced four (4) hurricanes during late 2004 which had major impacts for weeks and weeks on city, county and institutional operations along with sustained power and utility service outages, flooding and high wind damages to thousands of structures.<sup>1</sup>

It began with Hurricane Charley on August 13-14th, and was closely followed by Hurricane Frances on Sept. 6-7<sup>th</sup>; Hurricane Ivan on Sept. 15-16th and finally Hurricane Jeanne on Sept. 27-28<sup>th</sup>. These 6-weeks of hurricanes had a lasting impact till today...

<sup>1</sup> – "20 years ago: When the hurricanes kept hitting Florida"; Ocala StarBanner; Published July 29, 2024; Article and photographs at: <https://www.ocala.com/picture-gallery/news/local/2024/07/29/20-year-anniversary-of-back-to-back-hurricanes/74588616007/>

"To bring about change, you must not be afraid to take the first step. When you change your thoughts, remember to also change your world." – Rosa Parks

While Hurricane Charley was a major rain machine, Hurricane Frances caused the majority of damages due to its center passing just a few miles south of Marion County as it travelled east towards Orlando which pushed many FL residents into emergency shelters here in Marion County for weeks when homes were severely damaged or flooded and made unlivable. The following two hurricanes added to damages caused by winds and flooding and that further delayed the repairs to damaged infrastructure.

Marion County and the City of Ocala provided shelter, food and water to many hundreds for weeks. It was these recurring events in 2004 that caused the need for continuous radio support at the shelters and the creation of MERT by the Division of Emergency Management.

**MERT Members** – Thank you for your support and commitment to help others when they need help!

**Special Note:** With this edition, we salute **Leon Jurcyszyn** whose decade of service to MERT is being recognized. We honor the many examples he set and know it inspired others to learn more, do more and reach a little higher than they thought possible! Leon, you will be missed good friend!

Sending Merry Christmas and Happy Hanukkah to all.



## 2024 Hurricane Facts

What was the most destructive and costly hurricane duo hitting the U.S. in history? Helene and Milton (2024 - \$295 billion) rank second all-time, just behind Hurricanes Harvey and Irma (2017 - \$300+ billion).

## MERT supports local 5K Walk/Run Event



**June Benoit, Stone Creek  
CERT Leader**

June Benoit, Stone Creek CERT Leader stopped by to thank MERT member Phil Lewis (W4EUV) for organizing and leading the communications teams supporting each aid station during the “Spooky Striders 5k Walk/Run Event”.

MERT provided licensed and trained radio Operators supporting the event organizers with real time information from each Aid Station. Congratulations to members Nick Kiddey (W4NFK), Ray Woody (WB6FKJ) and Bill Sobel (K1WLS) for their fantastic support!

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” — Margaret Mead

## **Training Focus – MERT’s HF Go Kit**

MERT membership participated in several deep dive training sessions into our High Frequency radio capabilities in the radio room.... along with the HF Go Kit we have. The details are:



**MERT’s HF Go Kit was a focus of training during November and December.**

- A) Why MERT's HF resources supporting emergency communications (EMCOMM) is vital in maintaining radio contact with the State EOC and the Federal Government in Washington.
- B) Members learned what is included in the HF Go Kit (radios, power supplies, cables and specialty hardware), why is each piece vital to EMCOMM op's and how are each piece used.
- C) Members learned the kit actually is an “All Band” supporting 2 Meter and 70 cm communications with the included Icom IC-880H D-Star radio.
- D) An updated inventory list was created which included the addition of several pieces needed for deployments.
- E) A detailed review of what antennas can be used with the HF Go Kit when deployed. The classes included when to use which type and then a deep dive into long range antennas like MERT's tunable vertical and temporary end-feed long wire antennas (for national and international communications) to the NVIS Go Kit (for local and state-wide coverage).
- F) Members were trained on how radio propagation affects HF communications and where to find current HF propagation information on MERT's website (KG4NXO.com) under the "Quick Links" tab.
- G) Additionally, specific information about the two HF antennas on the EOC tower along with the radio stations #4 and #5 dedicated to HF communications was reviewed. It included the new support tower Preston had built and which will be installed soon.
- H) The review included basic information on the Yaesu Motorized Mobile Antenna: ATAS-120A. This is a unique mobile antenna designed for use with Yaesu Radio which uses a motorized tuning system that resonates the radiating element for the lowest SWR.

When more favorable weather returns, a Field Exercise is planned to deploy, set up and operate both radio systems using multiple antenna types (mag-base tuned 2 Meter, ATAS-120A multi-band dipole and the 80 Meter/40 Meter NVIS antenna).

## Thanks Royce!



Royce Hagerman  
(KD7SNN)

We sincerely thank Royce Hagerman (KD7SNN) for his gift in constructing an antenna case for the Yaesu ATAS-120A multi-band antenna MERT owns. His gift will protect this specialized antenna from damages in storage and while being transported on exercises and deployments.

He has also labeled the protection case making its identification quick and easy for all members in the future.

Thank you, Royce!

## Upgraded HF Support Tower Received



(L) New high-strength tower is hurricane rated. Installation pending.



(C) Existing 20-year-old pole is showing its age.



(R) This photo shows the new location of the HF tower supporting the OCF HF antenna.

(L) The upgraded hurricane rated HF tower will be placed at a new location further from the building and trees. This move will also improve HF radio receiver quality.

## Repeater Upgrades Underway

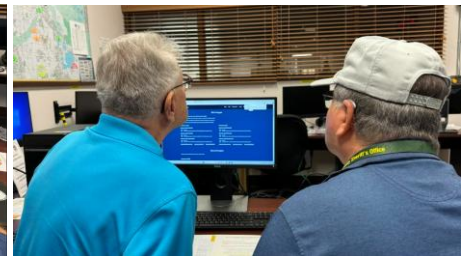


(L) Bill Gillespie (KW5BG), Phil Lewis (W4EVV) and Leon Jurcyszyn (K8ZAG) starting the software upgrades for the new 2 Meter repeaters.



(C) Leon and Phil waiting for the new software to load.

Not shown: Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)



(L) Leon and Phil reviewing the error messages. As with most programs, new software does have bugs needing to be resolved.

**Thank You, Farewell and Good Luck to our Good Friend!**

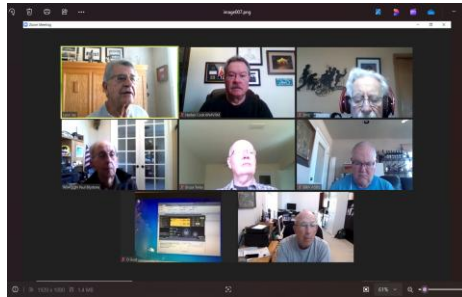
December 11, 2024 saw the end of a decade of service to MERT and the Division of Emergency Management by Leon Jurcyszyn K8ZAG who tirelessly supported, lead and Elmered dozens and dozens of MERT members and hams in this area.

His contributions have been significant along with his passion to share the wonders of all that amateur radio can provide as a hobby and as a life-saving resource in emergency communications.

This tribute is dedicated to his knowledge, enthusiasm and passion leading MERT.



**Leon Jurcyszyn – K8ZAG**



When the pandemic hit the U.S. in early 2020, Coordinator Chuck Richards resigned and moved to home school his grandchildren in MD. Leon stepped up and became MERT Coordinator and faced the immediate challenge that no meetings at the EOC were allowed. To keep MERT functioning, Leon single-handedly kept MERT active by organizing Zoom resources for all meetings and training events from his personal funds.

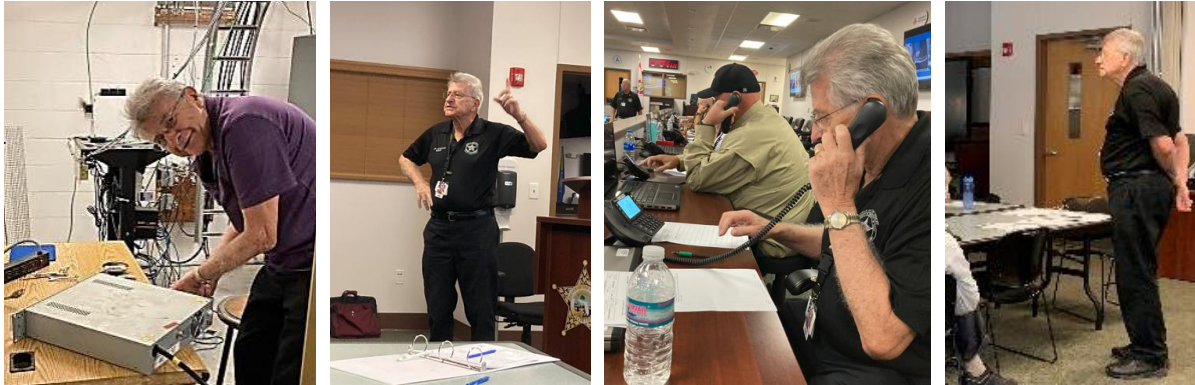
A commitment to Service: Did you know that Leon and other Members spent 72-hours of continuous service during Hurricane Irma in 2017 when our area of Florida experienced significant damages knocking out power, cellular phone, Internet and landline services throughout Marion County? He demonstrated his commitment to MERT’s Mission by his own service and support to the Members staffing the Shelters and EOC.



After the retirement and passing of several key members around 2015/16, another role Leon took on (and mastered) was learning the highly technical and complex programming requirements of the digital D-Star radio system MERT has. Through thousands of hours, he taught himself the programming language necessary to support the radio system controllers. Leon also added VARA FM digital Winlink capabilities to MERT’s Digipeater KG4NXO-10 on 145.030 MHz located at the Sheriff’s Office Complex tower.

**The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart. - Helen Keller**

We celebrate these events and special times with Leon in service to MERT!



**Leon Jurcyszyn – 10-year Member, Technical Advisor and MERT Coordinator**

"We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." - Winston Churchill



You are hereby awarded this Meritorious Volunteer Service Award to acknowledge your service to the Marion County Sheriff's Office. For the last decade, your great generosity has had a profound and lasting impact on the Marion County Sheriff's Office – Division of Emergency Management and the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT). Your willingness to share your time by volunteering to act as MERT Leader and Coordinator during the pandemic was very successful and resulted in MERT's continued readiness and ability to support the Hurricane Impact Shelters. Your leadership and profound knowledge working in multiple Emergency Activations over the years speaks volumes about your care for others needing help, your strength and the quality of your character. You have set a high standard for others to follow.

Your above and beyond efforts have helped the Sheriff's Office in maintaining a high quality of service to the citizens of Marion County, Florida.



Leon Jurcyszyn – Always doing, always helping and always modelling service to others. His **Meritorious Volunteer Service Award** from Sheriff Billy Woods is presented by Major Kevin Rowe, Bureau Chief; Marion County Sheriff's Office.

"Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile." - Albert Einstein



**Major Kevin Rowe, Leon and Joann Jurcyszyn.**



**Recognizing a Decade of Service by Leon Jurcyszyn**

(L – R) Harlan Cook, MERT Coordinator; Major Kevin Rowe, Marion County Sheriff's Office; **Leon Jurcyszyn, Past MERT Coordinator; Mrs. Joann Jurcyszyn;** and, Bill Gillespie, MERT Assistant Coordinator.

**"I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve." - Albert Schweitzer**





**“All - View from the rear of our new condo, Imlay City MI. Leon”**

Goodbye, good friend. You will be missed!