

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

August 2025

MERT's primary role is to support all open Evacuation Shelters throughout Marion County (FL) during declared Emergency events. We also support the Emergency Operations Center Incident Commander, staff and other EMCOMM groups (CERT, HEC, ARES) with voice, image & data communications locally, statewide and across the United States.

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

Next Bimonthly Meeting

Sept. 20th, 10:00 am at
the EOC

All Amateur Radio Operators
are Welcomed!

Meetings conducted in Jan,
March, May, July, Sept. and Nov.

Why Volunteer Emergency Communications **Matters** During Hurricane Season



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

Every hurricane season reminds us just how fragile basic utilities and conventional communication systems can be. In the face of powerful hurricanes, electrical power networks go dark, cell towers fail, Internet services go offline, and even public service radios can falter under strain. What remains is the steady, practiced voice of the emergency communicator – a licensed amateur radio operator whose NIMS trained, prepared, and ready to keep information flowing when it's needed most.

Volunteer emergency communications (EMCOMM) play a vital role in ensuring public safety when Marion County faces severe weather. Through MERT, our trained team of dedicated radio operators' steps in to support the **Division of Emergency Management**, Emergency Operations Center (EOC), Hospitals, CERT communities and other vital agencies when needed most. We become the eyes and ears across Marion County, relaying conditions, vital shelter updates, resource needs, and emergency calls that would otherwise go unheard (like we did in 2022's Hurricane Ian when members responded to emergency radio calls requesting help for a 65-year-old female in Lee County, FL needing SAR help off the roof of her flooded home.)

Participation isn't just important - it's personal. By volunteering, **YOU** become part of a network that prioritizes community care over chaos. Whether you're stationed at a shelter, at

"As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands — one for helping yourself, the other for helping others."

- Audrey Hepburn

the EOC monitoring local, state and national networks, or reporting from your residence, your voice helps provide information that decision-makers need to act quickly and confidently. You help ensure that families stay informed, responders stay coordinated, and operations run smoothly under pressure.

MERT's infrastructure – all our repeaters, towers, radios and field gear - is only as strong as the people behind it. During hurricanes, **it's our members** who embody resilience, stepping in when others step back. It's your calm under stress, your technical skill, and your service-minded spirit that brings stability to turbulent and chaotic situations.

We train for the worst, so our neighbors experience the best possible outcome. Every volunteer brings value, whether you're a seasoned MERT radio expert or new to amateur radio communications and the Incident Command System (ICS).

What matters most is being present, being prepared, and being willing to act. This hurricane season, please step forward! Be the link in the chain that keeps everyone in Marion County connected. When everything else goes silent, your signal could be the one that makes all the difference. Our moto is our guide....

"When all else fails. Call MERT!"

Thank you, members, for your participation and support!

HR Cook

MERT Thanks these Members

With Coordinator Harlan Cook and Deputy Coordinator Bill Gillespie out of state last month, these members stepped up to ensure MERT was ready for any assignment. Please thank them for their leadership.



(L-R) Bill Gillespie, Ray Woody, Nick Kiddey, Cindy Sheffield and Harlan Cook

- Ray Woody (WB6FKJ) acting Coordinator on Duty
- Cindy Sheffield (K9LRX) Deputy Coordinator
- Nick Kiddey (W4NFK) Deputy Coordinator

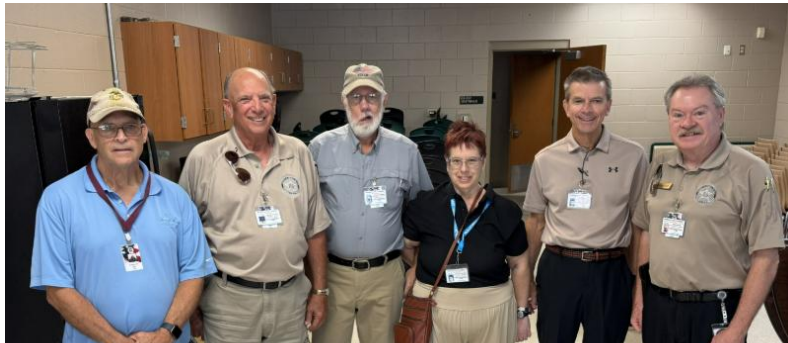


MERT NEEDS YOU!

**Please renew your participation in MERT activities,
practicing Winlink messages and weekly radio Nets.**

"It's easy to make a buck. ... It's a lot tougher to make a difference." - Tom Brokaw

Shelter Audit Update – Forest High School now Operational!



(L-R) Jim Lowe AU4JL, Nick Kiddey W4NFK, Royce Hagerman KD7SNN, Cindy Sheffield K9LRX, Ray Woody WB6FKJ and Harlan Cook KN4VRM.



Radio test setup.



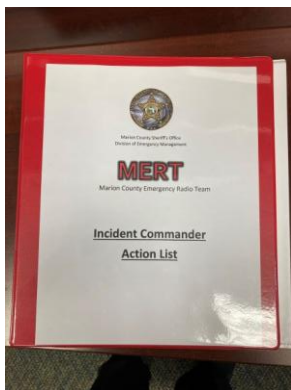
Robert Miller
Forest High School

In late-June, a team of members visited Forest High School to re-test and if necessary, make additional repairs to the MERT radio connections which had been moved by the facilities staff due to some building changes.

We are happy to report SWR testing along with on-air radio tests confirmed the relocation of the cabling from the antenna to a new improved site in the Teachers' Lounge passes the necessary technical requirements for successful operations (SWR from 1.3 to 1.8).

We sincerely thank Robert Miller, Facility Mgr., MCPS for his support and work prior to our visit to complete repairs.

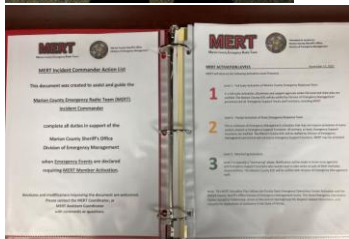
RED BOOK Review



Acting Coordinator Ray Woody (WB6FKJ) led a refresher class on a resource available to all Members in the Radio Room called the “**Red Book**”. It is a detailed step-by-step reference guide for anyone assigned or filling the position of MERT Incident Commander (IC).

Using the Red Book will help guide the IC through the Pre-Activation, Activation and Post-Activation steps in detailing what activities are important to conduct in maximizing the overall ability of members to be safe and successful in completing every activity and assignment.

Since Hurricane Nicole in 2022, the “**Red Book**” has been used for every activation with it continuously updated with new steps, information and reminders added after every event. Look for the “**Red Book**” in the EOC radio room next to the SHREK Kit binders in the bookcase top row.



NEW FCC Licensee Santos Pagan – KR4FEP

MERT is very proud to announce member Pagan Santos passed his Federal Communications Commission (FCC) amateur radio Technician test and was awarded license - KR4FEP.

Pagan is now on-the-air as he has already purchased a mobile and HT radio in participating with the weekly MERT and CERT/MERT radio Nets.

Congratulations Santos!!

If we can get our license – so can YOU! If you want to obtain your amateur radio license, please let MERT know so we can help! Email KG4NXO@marionso.com



(L-R) Bill Gillespie, Deputy Coordinator, Pagan Santos, Member and Harlan Cook, Coordinator celebrate his new FCC license - KR4FEP!

Very Best Wishes to Rob Morris



Rob Morris, MCSO Deputy and Emergency Management Coordinator

MERT has learned that Rob Morris will be leaving the Division of Emergency Management for a new job with the Palm Beach County, Division of Emergency Management and serve as its Logistics Manager overseeing a 10-person department. (Note: Palm Beach County has 1.6 million residents.)

Rob served as the MERT Advisor in 2023/24 who was a valued supporter of all our members and activities.

We wish the very best for Rob and hope he will stay in touch on EMCOMM activities going on in Palm Beach County, FL.

Forest Tower Plan Update

Most successful project outcomes start with... a **good plan** and that's what MERT did on July 23rd in regards to the Forest Tower repeater activation. Here's what was reviewed:

- Why is this new repeater important to MERT's Mission?
- Where is it located?
- What type of tower is it and how high will MERT's antenna be mounted at?
- What does the communications room interior look like?
- What repeater will be used?
- What band will the repeater be on and what are transmit and receive frequencies?
- Will it require a PLL code to connect?

- What does the equipment connection drawing look like?
- Will the new site have standby power for reliability?
- Has a Radio Line-of-Site Path Analysis been completed?
- Will the EOC radios be able to connect to the new repeater at the Ocala Forest?

Additionally, MERT Repeater Manager Phil Lewis (W4EVV) reviewed the key technical and operational aspects of the Yaesu DR-1X repeater to be used at the site. **Thank you, Phil!**



Phil Lewis, MERT Repeater Manager, provides an overview on the Yaesu DR-1X 144/430 Dual Band C4FM/FM Digital Repeater to be used at the new Forest Tower repeater.

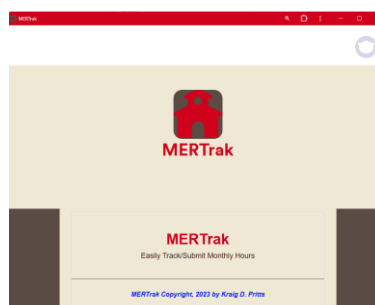
MERT Local News Update

The online news outlet “Marion Citizen” had a fun article about the Division of Emergency Management support organizations **CERT** in the Ocala Palms neighborhood. The reporter also mentioned **MERT**, its responsibilities along with member Dave Gustufson (WB9EEH) support. If you see an article about MERT, email: KG4NXO@marionso.com



Read the entire article at: https://www.chroneonline.com/weeklies/marion_citizen/life-in-ocala-palms-cert-helps-local-communities-handle-disasters-such-as-hurricanes/article_ad9b8ecd-651e-5399-849d-14afae9222c3.html

Volunteer Time Reporting - **MERTrak**



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.

“The purpose of life is not to be happy, but to matter – to be productive, to be useful, to have it make some difference that you have lived at all.” – Leo Rosten

What do I report in **MERT**trak?

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 including time studying for ICS classes.
- 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) for his time and skillful expertise creating MERTrak. Thank you, Kraig!

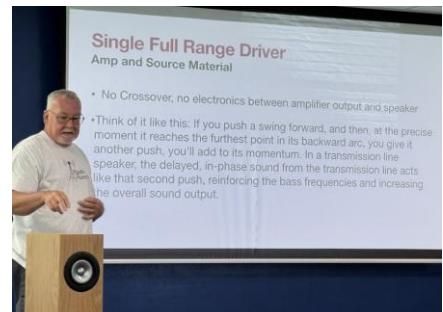
Fun @ the Silver Springs Radio Club Meeting

On Saturday, July 26th, the Silver Springs Radio Club (SSRC) had two presentations which were very interesting focused on the comeback of very high-fidelity audio amplifiers and speakers.

The first was on “Vacuum Tubes & Tube Amplifiers” by Ed Long (WA4SWJ) who shared the key elements of vacuum tubes and their evolution and current use for very high-quality audio amplifiers. The second presentation on “Single Driver Speakers” by Andy Allen (NA4DA) included some speaker basics along with details on what makes a single driver speaker an exceptional sound reproducing device for personal enjoyment. Andy also shared several recordings highlighting the crisp and clear examples possible. Kudos to both speakers and the SSRC for the enjoyable presentations and fun learning opportunities!



(L) Ed Long WA4SWJ
(C) A Class A high-fidelity audio amplifier (R) Andy Allen NA4DA



“Volunteering is at the very core of being a human. No one has made it through life without someone else’s help.” – Heather French Henry

Oops! Another one Bites the dust...

MERT lost another “oldie but goodie” piece of equipment when one of our Astron, RS-20A 12-volt DC power supplies quit recently. We cannot complain on its long service (nearly 15-years) but will see it is repaired to continue having the spares to support our operations when needed.



(L) The control board shows a major failure. (R) One of our very reliable and high quality 12-volt DC supplies.

A bucket-list adventure!



Harlan Cook fishing on Day 2 in the Valdez Arm narrows for ocean salmon.

MERT Coordinator Harlan Cook shared his “bucket list” trip to Alaska fishing for 7-days in early July was an incredible adventure. Since it WAS ALASKA.... it also had very cold weather, rain, fog and several hours riding out some big waves and challenging weather unique to the Gulf of Alaska, it was an incredible trip of a lifetime including seeing magnificent views and multiple glaciers.

All Members are welcomed to share your own memorable Moments with the Communications Update. We’d love to publish your experience and story for all to enjoy! Please includes lots of photos too!

For more information of the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT), visit:

KG4NXO.com