



## COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

October 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

November 15th, 10:00 am at the EOC

All Amateur Radio Operators are Welcomed!

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

### Working Together: MERT's Commitment to Be Ready



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)  
MERT Coordinator

Behind every clear transmission, emergency alert, and coordinated response is a team of volunteers who are ready to make it possible. At MERT, our current volunteers are leading an ambitious effort to update, renew, replace, and improve the communications infrastructure that serves the Division of Emergency Management. It's a quiet revolution with a powerful impact which is only possible with the strong leadership and support of Preston Bowlin, Director along with Erin Miller, Deputy Director; Logan Stamp, Emergency Management Coordinator; Nathan Hime, Emergency Management Planner; and, Darian Tucker, Administrative Assistant.

Across the county, from Ocala to the center of the national forest, volunteers have been hard at work replacing aging repeaters, rebuilding our systems on the towers, expanding battery backup resources and insuring shelters are in good working order. These aren't just hardware improvements—they're lifelines being strengthened by people who really care about our community safety and resilience when the majority are unable to do anything to help others.

The recent installation of a new repeater in the Ocala National Forest, the equipment moves and enhancement of the Sheriff's Complex tower last fall, and the rebuilt EOC tower and systems represent milestones driven by many hundreds of hours of collaboration, technical

skill, and commitment.

Volunteers have replaced and upgraded EOC tower coaxial cable runs two years ago, tested and repaired systems equipment and ensured that every link in the emergency communications (EMCOMM) chain performs when needed. The team has also expanded MERT's capabilities by receiving a SHARES license and improving the capabilities of every Operator when they deploy to the Shelters with enhanced SHREK Go Kit inventories. These upgrades mean improved capabilities, greater reliability, better response times, clearer communications and broader coverage in times of crisis.

But what truly sets MERT apart is the team itself. Diverse in background but united in purpose, our volunteers bring together new members, seasoned radio operators, tech-savvy troubleshooters, and passionate community advocates. They don't just respond when disaster strikes—they train and prepare in advance, anticipate challenges, and innovate solutions. Their camaraderie and shared vision have transformed MERT into a vital arm of Marion County's emergency response network.

Together, we're building a system that won't just endure the next hurricane - it will help in guiding our community safely through it. And with each system adjusted, cable replaced, signal fine-tuned and repeater added, our volunteers are proving what's possible when dedication meets a commitment to help the residents of Marion County. We can all be proud of our work as we support our motto... **"When all else fails. Call MERT!"**

Thank you, members for your participation and enthusiastic support!



Ps: Thank you for reporting all your volunteer hours in **MERTrak**.

### Ocala Forest Tower Repeater Update

As testing continues across north Florida with MERT's new Ocala Forest repeater (147.210 MHz; +600 kHz; 123 PL), additional revisions are being made. The most recent is focused on improving the reliability and operational life of the repeater unit should extensive use be required during a major hurricane event.

Radio transmitter/receivers (repeaters) can be subject to failure if the unit is required to operate continuously while supporting major events. This long operational use is referred to as a heavy "duty-cycle" and can push the transmitter portion of the repeater to overheat to a point causing failure. To reduce this from happening, repeaters can be adjusted to lower transmitter power and a heavy-duty post-amplifier be added to maintain coverage.



Repeater with post-amp installed.

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

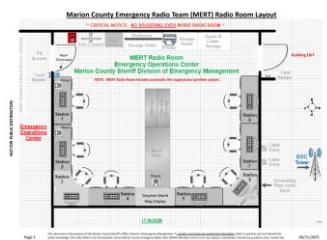


Towards this objective, we are very thankful to Andy Allen (NA4DA) who recommended this revision and loaned his custom-built post-amplifier in support of MERT's mission and responsibilities. We appreciate his generous support and the equipment loan. Thanks Andy!

(L) Andy Allen NA4DA upgrading the new Forest repeater with his loaned post-amplifier.

MERT INCIDENT RADIO COMMUNICATIONS PLAN (ICS-205)

With the ongoing testing of the new Forest Tower repeater confirming its operational usefulness to MERT's radio coverage, our communications plan was modified to reflect its addition as a key resource during all future activations. Please secure a copy of the 9/25/2025 version of our ICS-205 showing its addition as Channel 5. Visit: [KG4NXO.com](http://KG4NXO.com) and the tab "Quick Links" for your

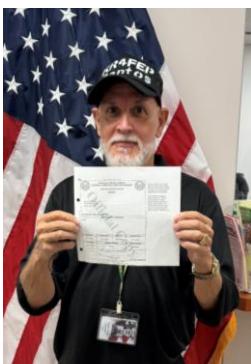


## EOC Radio Room Update

Another updated document includes the EOC Radio Room diagram. MERT is adding a radio at Station 2 to support the fulltime monitoring of our new Forest repeater which supports direct EOC to EOC communications. Visit: [KG4NXO.com](http://KG4NXO.com) for a copy.

## Member Updates!

Kudos to the following members who are stepping up and challenging themselves to new levels while supporting MERT. Please join me in congratulating them all!



**New  
General License  
Santos Pagan  
KR4FEP**



**New  
Logistics Manager  
Royce Hagerman  
KD7SNN**



**New  
Deputy Logistics Manager  
Cindy Sheffield  
K9LRX**



**New  
CERT Liaison  
Kraig Pritts  
KA2LHO**

**“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**

## Field Exercise @ the MCSO Northwest Office – Salt Springs



(L) The latest Field Excise location was a re-test from the Salt Springs area originally conducted in 2020. The great news is the results went from 0 radio repeaters contacted then to 15 on the recent test!

MERT thanks all members who supported this important exercise!



Royce Hagerman KD7SNN and Ray Woody WB6FKJ loading radios, antennas and portable towers.



Phil Lewis W4EVV checks in with Jaime Gillan, Administrative Assistant with the MCSO Office.



The new MERT pop up tent was very welcomed in keeping the hot sun off all the operators during the tests.



(L) MERT's telescoping tower and Yagi 2 Meter/70 cm antenna were important components for the successful radio communications test results at the Salt Springs Field Exercise.



Members successfully conducted 15 specific frequency tests during the Exercise using the new Forest repeater and others around Marion County.

Santos Pagan KR4FEP notes radio test results as Royce Hagerman KD7SNN conducts them. Mark Weible in back.



Harlan Cook KN4VRM adjust a second Yagi antenna before conducting tests.



Phil Lewis W4EVV and Mark Weible await the results of a Winlink Digital test.

MERT is planning its next Field Exercise and will soon announce its location and primary focus on our voice and digital network systems (repeaters, antennas, radios and portable hardware Go Kits).

## September Meeting Update

The September meeting had great speakers, excellent information to learn and timely updates on training and exercise results by MERT, Hospital HEC and ARES teams. We also welcomed special guests from the North Florida Amateur Radio Club in Alachua County who provided a informative overview of their amateur radio activities. (Visit:

<https://www.nf4rc.club/>

### MERT

MONTHLY MEETING  
AGENDA  
September 20, 2025

10:00 am

- Welcome! Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Attendee Introductions (Name, Call Sign and Organization)
- Silent Key Acknowledgements
  - A moment of silence for all our friends who are infirmed or passed.
- MERT Coordinator Update Harlan Cook (KN4VRM) MERT Coordinator
  - Welcome!
  - Introduction of Special Guests
- Guest Speaker – Alachua County ARES Brett Wallace NH2KW
  - Alachua AUXCOMM Update (Website: [www.nf4rc.club/](http://www.nf4rc.club/))
  - Past & Future Objectives
    - New EOC
    - Future collaboration w/MERT
    - Future collaboration w/N FL AUXCOMM Work Group
- MERT Deputy Coordinator Update Bill Gillespie (KV5BG) Deputy Coordinator
  - North FL AUXCOMM Work Group Meeting Review
  - AUXCOMM Mtg in Lake County EOC – Thursday, Oct. 2nd
  - Special Requests
    - Training 1 – KK4DFC & KK4AEG
    - Logistics Manager
    - Deputy Logistics Manager
    - New MERT Member



- HF Propagation Update Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)



- ARES Coordinator Update Hayden Kaufman (N9HAY) Marion County ARES Coordinator



- Net Control Operator Class – Lake County EOC
- Operation Iron Spill Exercise Review – Sept. 6th
- ARES website updates
- Prototype of the new ARESMCL ID credential
- Upcoming Events and Activities



- HEC Update Dave Walker HEC Coordinator (W2SRP)

- 2025 Hospital Emergency Team Update



- Emergency Shelter Update Ray Woody MERT Shelter Manager (WB6FKJ)

- South Marion High School Update

- North Marion High School Shelter – Use On Hold



- Attendee's Suggestions, Questions & Answers

- ALL Recommendations for the Good of our Organizations is invited

### MERT's September Meeting Agenda



**(L) Harlan Cook, Coordinator welcomed 26 attendees to the monthly meeting.**

**(R) Guest speaker Brett Wallace NH2KW, Alachua County, shares his update on Future Objectives; New EOC status; and future collaboration w/N FL AUXCOMM Work Group.**



**(Far Left) Brett Wallace provides a thorough update on Alachua County activities.**  
**(L) New MERT member Don Webb W9EBB is presented his Welcome letter sharing his approved application by the MCSO.**

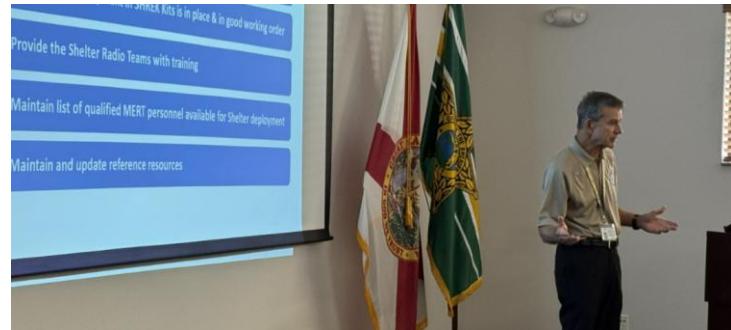
**(R) Bill Gillespie, Deputy Coordinator and Harlan Cook, presents KK4AEG Trustee Certificate to Gary Nicholas HQ4HQD.**  
**(Far Right) Phil Lewis W4EVV is presented the KK4DFC Trustee Certificate.**



**“We can benefit others through our actions by being warm and generous toward them, by being charitable, and by helping those in need.” -Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama**



(L) Bill Gillespie, Deputy Coordinator and Harlan Cook present Royce Hagerman KD7SNN his MCSO Uniform in completing Levels I & II of the New Member Orientation Taskbook. Additionally, Royce received his Logistics Manager Certificate.



(R) Ray Woody WB6FKJ, Shelter Manager presents an update on his responsibilities and duties supporting MERT's shelter activities. Ray also provided an update on the next shelter to open at the new South Marion High School. He also explained more the Shelter Reference Manual and Shelter Op's binder.



(Far Left) Dave Welker W2SRP HEC Coordinator share the results of the latest HEC Exercise results with attendees.

(L) Gray Moffett KC3DWY Marion County ARES Assistant Emergency Coordinator shares updates on the Iron Spill Exercise and the Net Control Op. class for amateur radio operators.



Kraig Pritts KA2LHO

### CERT Liaison Update – Kraig Pritts

MERT member and CERT Liaison Kraig Pritts KA2LHO shares there is a new CERT class on the dates listed below at the EOC.



- October 04, 2025 Saturday
- October 11, 2025 "
- October 28, 2025 "
- October 25, 2025 "
- November 1, 2025 "

Participants can secure and complete an application at the first class.

Classes generally run from 8:00 am to 12:30 pm. Participants are very encouraged to attend all classes to receive a certificate.

Limited class make up opportunities *may be available... depending on the class missed.*



## **MBA Net Update**

MERT Member and Marion Baptist Association (MBA) Liaison Mark Weible N4GPA, shares their Net times have changed. The “Disaster Relief Net” now meets at 9:00 p.m. Tuesdays. on the KA4WJA Repeater (Receive: 146.970 MHz, -600 kHz; No Tone).

(Note: Locally, this repeater is often referred to as the “970 repeater” or the “Anthony repeater”. Access throughout Marion County is usually very good, even if participating with a Handi-Talkie (HT).)

This week, their NET will be talking about the National SOS Radio Network and how to develop a community network of FRS and GMRS operators. An informative reference is at: Visit: [https://radiorelay.org/files/sos/National\\_SOS\\_hurricane\\_flood\\_flyer%202021-8-9.pdf](https://radiorelay.org/files/sos/National_SOS_hurricane_flood_flyer%202021-8-9.pdf)

For more information, contact Mark Weible at [mark@ams.mba](mailto:mark@ams.mba) or visit: [www.ams.mba](http://www.ams.mba)

## **Robert Ethridge – New Emergency Management Coordinator**

We are very pleased sharing Robert Ethridge was selected to fill the open Emergency Management Coordinator position for the Division of Emergency Management. Mr. Ethridge transfers from his current duties as a Deputy Sheriff since receiving his Florida Law Enforcement Certificate. Prior to that responsibility, he served as the Volunteer Coordinator for the Marion County Sheriff’s Office (MCSO).

We are looking forward to welcoming Mr. Ethridge and the opportunity of working with him to continue advancing MERT’s Mission into the future.



**Robert Ethridge, new Emergency Management Coordinator, Division of Emergency Management.**

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

**KG4NXO.com**

All hams are welcomed to attend all MERT meetings every Wednesday from 9:00 am till Noon at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC); 692 NW 30<sup>th</sup> Ave., Ocala, FL.

“The greatest waste in the world is the difference between what we are... and what we could become!” - Ben Herbster (American Clergyman)