

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

November 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 Monthly Meeting

**January 17th, 10:00 am at
the EOC**

**All Amateur Radio Operators
are Welcomed!**

**Meetings conducted in Jan,
March, May, July, Sept.**

Fall in Florida is here...or is it Winter?



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

Isn't this a wonderful time of year to enjoy in north Florida!

First, it was 49°F this morning and it's just October 30th. Brrrr.....so I'm wondering if November has some more surprises for us? Hopefully not.

Once again, I'm struck by the dedication, ingenuity, and collaborative spirit of our membership. Month after month, you continue to tackle real challenges, solve real problems, and engage in thoughtful discussions around AUXCOMM and the evolving responsibilities we face. This isn't just theory — it's action. It's impact. It's the kind of progress that makes a difference when it matters most.

Small steps lead to BIG steps so who would have imagined, just two or three years ago, that MERT would be capable of establishing direct EOC-to-EOC communications with counties all the way out on Florida's Atlantic coast? Back then, it was a hope... actually just a dream. But today, it's a reality. We did it! And not just in concept — we proved it works! This milestone is more than a technical achievement. It's a breakthrough that now enables direct voice and digital communications between multiple counties — even in the complete absence of traditional telecommunications infrastructure. No landlines. No cell towers. No internet. Just resilient, independent, MERT operator-driven capability. While it may sound like a "simple"

"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

accomplishment to some, we know better. This took a vision (thanks Preston Bowlin!), tons of planning, technical expertise, coordination, lots of patience... and then ACTION!

It's a testament to what happens when dedicated volunteers come together with a shared mission and a commitment to excellence. This success strengthens Marion County's emergency response capabilities and sets a new standard for what's possible across northern Florida, from the Atlantic to the Gulf. (Wow! Imagine if we had a MERT repeater on the West side of Marion County communicating with the Gulf counties!) So I couldn't be prouder of what we've accomplished — and I'm even more excited about what's next. Let's keep building. Let's keep innovating. And let's keep showing what MERT can do. *Small steps DO lead to **BIG STEPS**.*

As we celebrate this major success, it's also important to recognize where we still have work to do. One of our next critical priorities is resolving our SHARES challenges — and that starts with addressing the HF antenna issues which have limited our full participation. We've made great strides in building out our infrastructure, but to unlock the full potential of SHARES and ensure seamless interoperability, we need new, reliable and high-performing HF antenna capabilities at the EOC.

The ability to communicate regionally and nationally during emergencies depends on our ability to transmit and receive emergency communications clearly and consistently. That means solving antenna placement and performance issues with the same determination and creativity we've applied to everything else. I know we're up to the task in solving this issue.

But technical fixes alone won't get us there. We also need to expand our collective knowledge through a focused, sustained effort on training. Whether it's mastering HF propagation, understanding SHARES protocols, or refining our digital modes, we all benefit when we invest in learning together. Thanks for joining our "Check In's", studying, peer mentoring, and hands-on NET practice to build confidence and capability across everyone on the team.

This next phase is about strengthening our foundation. With the right antennas and the right training, we'll be ready to meet the moment — whenever and whatever it brings. And just like our recent success with EOC-to-EOC communications with the Atlantic coast counties, I believe we will look back in the future and say once more... ***"MERT did it again!"***

We can all be proud of our work as we support our motto...

"When all else fails. Call MERT!"



MERT Welcomes New Member Gary Nicholas!



(L-R) Nathan Hime, Div. of Emergency Management Planner;
Logan Stamp, Div. of Emergency Management Coordinator;
Gary Nicholas KQ4HQD; Bill Gillespie, Deputy Coordinator; and,
Harlan Cook, Coordinator.

MERT is thrilled to announce that Gary Nicholas has officially completed the probationary period with the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT) and successfully fulfilled all requirements of the Marion County Sheriff's Office Division of Emergency Management's Standard Operating Guidelines.

Gary has completed Levels 1 & 2 of the New Member Orientation Task Book and is now recognized as a Full Member of MERT. His commitment, perseverance, and enthusiasm for emergency communications have made a meaningful impact, and we're excited to see his future contributions supporting MERT. (Note: Gary has also accepted serving as the Website Manager executive position with MERT. Thank you!)

As a symbol of this achievement at a ceremony on October 15th, Gary was awarded the official Volunteer Uniform Shirt of the Marion County Sheriff's Office — a badge of honor he'll wear proudly at all meetings, activities, and events. Please join us in congratulating and welcoming Gary Nicholas as a full member to the MERT team!

New ICS-205 Communications Plan Available

With the addition of the new Ocala National Forest repeater added to MERT's resources, our Incident Radio Communications Plan (ICS-205) has been revised and updated.

The update now includes Channel 5 as the **EOC to EOC PRIMARY CHANNEL** for MERT. Additionally, a radio was added to Station #2 for 24x7 monitoring in all future emergency activations supporting adjacent counties AUXCOMM transmissions.

INCIDENT RADIO COMMUNICATIONS PLAN (ICS-205)									
DIVISION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT EMERGENCY ACTIVATIONS RADIO PLAN					MERT OPERATORS		Date/Time Prepared 25-Sep-25		
							Active Standard Operating Procedures		
CHANNEL (NUMBER)	ID-800W DISPLAY	RT DISPLAY	AGENCY	REPEATER CALL SIGN	FREQUENCY (Repeater MHz)	PL TONE	OFFSET KHz	MODE	COMMENTS
0	KK4DFC00		MERT	KK4DFC-V	146.770		-500 kHz	DV	PRIMARY SHELTER OPS CH. CHANNEL
1	KG4KX001		MERT	KG4KX0-V	146.170		-500 kHz	DV	SECONDARY SHELTER OPS CH.
2	KG4KX002		MERT	KG4KX0-U	443.875		+5 MHz	DV	3RD SHELTER OPS CH.
3	KJ4CLL03	KJ4CLL	MERT/CERT	KJ4CLL	145.330	123.0	-600 kHz	FM	CERT PRIMARY CHANNEL
4	K4GSO4	K4GSO	ARES	K4GSO	146.610	123.0	-600 kHz	FM	ARES PRIMARY CHANNEL
5	FOREST105	FOREST	MERT	NADA	147.210	123.0	+600 kHz	FM	EOC to EOC PRIMARY CHANNEL
6	ANTHONY06		ARES	K4ARJA	146.975		-600 kHz	FM	ARES BACKUP REPEATER
7	WINLINK07		MERT WINLINK	GATEWAY OR P2P	145.630			FM	WINLINK PRIMARY
8	WINLINK08		MERT WINLINK	GATEWAY OR P2P	145.630			FM	WINLINK SECONDARY
9	WINLINK09		MERT WINLINK	GATEWAY OR P2P	145.670			FM	WINLINK
10	WINLINK10		MERT WINLINK	GATEWAY OR P2P	145.770			FM	WINLINK
11	KK4DFC11		MERT SIMPLEX	KK4DFC-X	146.770			DV	PRIMARY SIMPLEX CHANNEL
12	KG4KX012		MERT SIMPLEX	KG4KX0-X	146.170			DV	SECONDARY SIMPLEX CHANNEL
13	KG4KX013		MERT SIMPLEX	KG4KX0-X	443.875			DV	3RD SIMPLEX CHANNEL
14	KJ4CLL14	MERT-S	MERT / CERT SIMPLEX	KJ4CLL-X	145.330			FM	CERT SIMPLEX CHANNEL
15	K4GSO15	ARES-S	ARES	AVOICE	146.580			FM	ARES SIMPLEX CHANNEL
16	DVOICE16		MERT	DVOICE	146.420			DV	SIMPLEX DIGITAL VOICE CH.
17	DVOICE17		MERT	DVOICE	146.480			DV	SIMPLEX DIGITAL VOICE CH.
18	AVOICE18	VOICE-S	MERT	AVOICE	146.400			FM	SIMPLEX ANALOG VOICE CH.
19	AVOICE19	VOICE-S	MERT	AVOICE	146.550			FM	SIMPLEX ANALOG VOICE CH.

DVOICE and DV = Digital Voice Transmission (D-STAR format) AVOICE and FM = FM Modulation Transmission WINLINK = Winlink Express Digital Communications
This Incident Radio Communications Plan is provided to all MERT / ALCOMM Operators for their reference and use during all emergency activations.
Marion County Sheriff's Office, Division of Emergency Management, Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT) use only. DO NOT DISTRIBUTE.

Visit: <https://kg4nxx.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/ICS-205-EMCOMM-Radio-Plan-2025-09-25.pdf>

New MERT Executive Leaders Announced



Shelter Manager

MERT recognizes Ray Woody (WB6FKJ) for his excellent work collecting and organizing all the shelter information and placing it into a quick reference binder at the EOC.

MERT is now more knowledgeable and prepared to support all Shelters. Ray will also lead our annual tests confirming all Shelters are fully functional.



New Member Manager

MERT welcomes the energy and enthusiasm Nick Kidney (W4NFK) brings to his new role for MERT. His ability to communicate the complexities of MERT membership requirements and responsibilities will help us grow as our Shelters expand in Marion County.



Deputy Logistics Manager

MERT is fortunate to have Cindy Sheffield (K9LRX) supporting our logistics management duties. She will team with Royce Hagerman, Logistics Manager.

Cindy brings past experiences with a TX SAR group and understands the role good logistics has for emergency service organizations.



HEC Liaison (Hospital Emergency Comm. Team)

(L-R) Nathan Hime, DEM Planner; Logan Stamp, DEM Coordinator; Bruce Twiss; Bill Gillespie, Deputy Coordinator; and, Harlan Cook, Coordinator.

MERT recognizes Bruce Twiss (KI4NFA) for his many years of service as HEC Liaison.



Deputy Shelter Manager

MERT recognizes Santos Pagan (KR4FEP) for his active participation since joining MERT! (PS: Santos just got his General License too!)

Santos will be teaming with Ray in keeping our Shelter records accurate and up-to-date.



Website Manager

MERT is excited to welcome Gary Nicholas (KQ4HQD) as Website Manager with his years of experience in web management. (Gary is MERT's newest member too!)

Gary will keep our website current, visually appealing, functional and secure while sharing MERT's story to all.



MBA Liaison (Marion Baptist Association Disaster Relief Team)

MERT recognizes Mark Weible (N4GPA) as MERT's representative to the MBA Disaster Relief Team.

The Team was created as an emergency communications support organization to the many churches and members in and around Marion County. Mark leads the group which has a regular NET every Tuesday night at 9:00 PM on the KA4WJA repeater at 146.970 MHz. (-600 kHz; no time)

Oct. 1st "Check In" Meeting – Work Party Day!



(L-R) Bill Gillespie, Cindy Sheffield and Cristine Nicholas Working together to reprogram all our HT's to the new ICS-205 Incident Radio Communications Plan.



(L-R) Cristine Nicholas, Jim Lowe and Gary Nicholas teaming up to complete the DC power cables on the new Station 2 radio. Hayden Kaufman & Santos Pagan setting up the new SHARES Alert Messaging system at Station 1.



(L-R) Royce Hagerman, Ray Sherwood and Dee Seagraves adding a new part to the SHREK kit inventory.



Ray Woody printing new updates for the Shelter Operator binders.



Nick Kiddey updating all the Shelter Operator Manuals with new and updated reference documents.

Members tackled several "pending projects" which included:

- Royce and Cindy collected all the equipment needed for the new Shelter planned at South Marion HS.
- A new inventory part was added to the SHRK kits allowing a direct HT to antenna connection.
- New DC power cables with Anderson power poles were added to the new radios at Stations 1 and 2.
- The outside lift pole was updated in supporting the "pole rings" line.

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

- All our HT's (Kenwood, Baofeng, Yaesu and Icom) were reprogrammed with the new ICS-205 Communications plan. After the reprogram, all units received a recharge.
- Several new document resources were printed and inserted into relevant manuals.

A very special thank you to everyone for the awesome teamwork!

MERT MBA Liaison Update

From Mark Weible (N4GPA) – “I was interviewed by a reporter from the Florida Baptist Convention state news outlet. The article ran in Florida and then was picked up by the Baptist Press. Baptist Press is the national news service for the Southern Baptist Convention with over 1 million readers.

Since they are a news service, their articles often get picked up by other publications. The article mentions **MERT** and my experience as a one-year member. A photo of our Salt Springs Field Day is also included in the article.



Mark, thank you for your MERT membership and great support! For more information, visit: <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/florida-ams-plans-church-ham-radio-network-for-disaster-communication/>

North FL AUXCOMM Work Group Meeting

On Thursday, October 2nd, Sgt. Jason Matthews hosted the second meeting of the Work Group at the Lake County EOC.



Eleven (11) counties were invited and meeting participants included Directors and Managers of Emergency Management; County Communications Leaders responsible for AUXCOMM (or EMCOMM) programs; and the AUXCOMM (amateur radio) leaders responsible for supporting each EOC during declared emergency events.



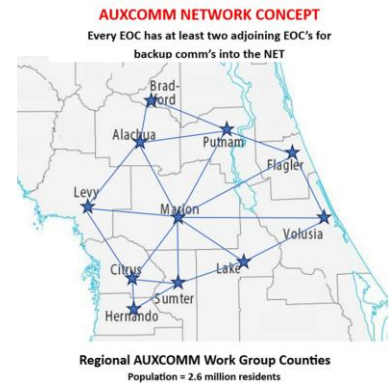
(Above) Sgt. Jason Matthews, Lake County All-Hazards Communications Unit Leader (COML) and Incident Management Team Leader.

The meeting Agenda included Lake County EMCOMM overview along with Work Group assignments and a facility tour.

“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

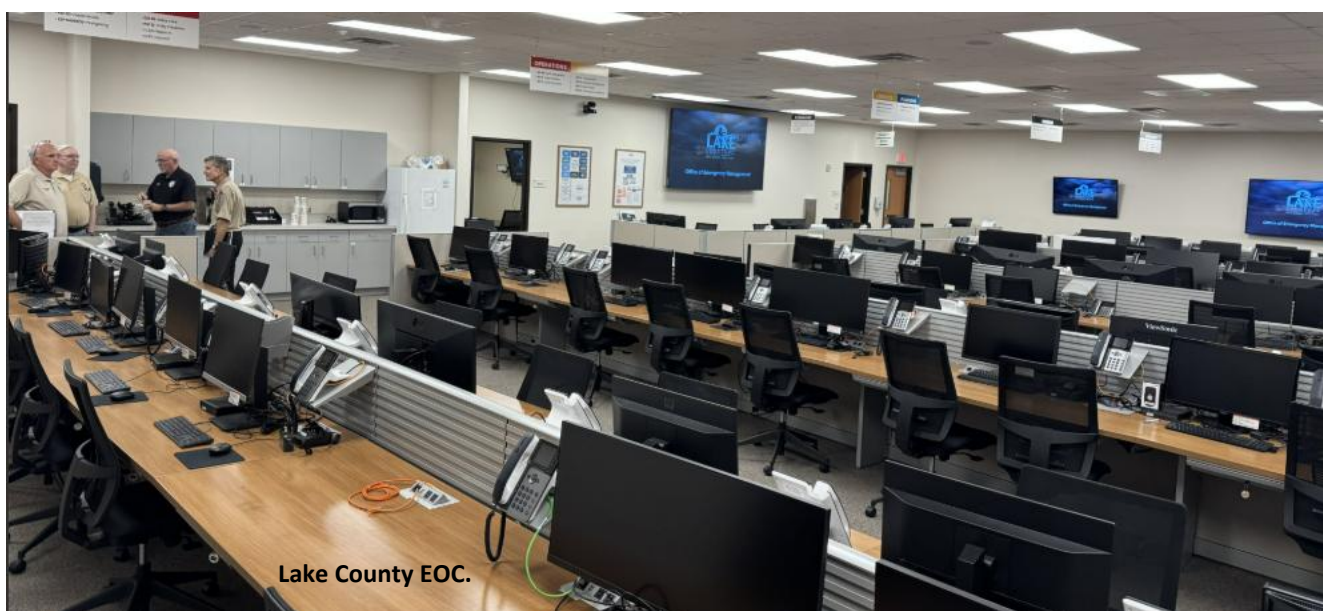
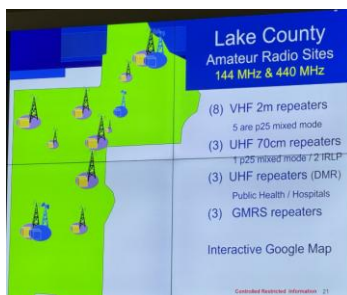
The Work Group objectives are:

- ✓ Creating contact lists and establishing Leadership communications channels between County AUXCOMM teams;
- ✓ Identify, catalog and share regional resources and networks (voice, Winlink & Fldigi digital) used by each AUXCOMM team;
- ✓ Be a resource sharing information and best practices;
- ✓ Develop/share cooperative training resources in helping achieve each county's Mission;
- ✓ Develop common EMCOMM procedures;
- ✓ Conduct regular EOC network tests verifying operational readiness of inter-EOC communications by all AUXCOMM teams;



Proposed Inter-County EOC to EOC voice and digital AUXCOMM network from the Atlantic to the Gulf.

Attending Leaders of the County Emergency Management organizations decided to support the project and determined the next meeting will be at the Flagler County EOC. Meeting details are pending.



“Wherever you turn, you can find someone who needs you. Even if it is a little thing, do something for which there is no pay but the privilege of doing it.” – Unknown

MERT Appreciation Visit

During the Wednesday, October 15th “Check In” meeting, Director Preston Bowlin visited in thanking everyone for MERT’s readiness to support any activations this year. He shared that while hurricane season is now down to being about a month away, don’t assume we are “out of the woods yet!” When asked if this has happened before... Director Bowlin replied that it had for at least a decade starting in 2006. Everyone in the room was surprised to learn this interesting factoid!

We sincerely thank him for the visit and outstanding support of MERT.



**Preston Bowlin,
Director of Emergency
Management**

New Member Event

New Member Manager Nick Kiddey (W4NFK) led several members manning a booth at the Stone Creek community Fall Festival on Saturday, Oct. 18th sharing MERT’s story and inviting fellow hams to join us.

Nick reports the team had good foot traffic and 5 guests signing up requesting more information.

The team was very proud showing off the new pop-up tent with our name and the Sheriff’s Office logo.

We compliment Nick on the excellent booth plan and materials showcasing MERT and our Mission! Joining Nick was Ray Woody, Santos Pagan, Royce Hagerman and Mrs. Hagerman. Harlan Cook provided tent transport support. **Thanks Nick, for your leadership!**



(L-R) Nick Kiddey, Santos Pagan and Ray Woody just completed setting up the booth and are testing their radios. Kudos to all for the teamwork!



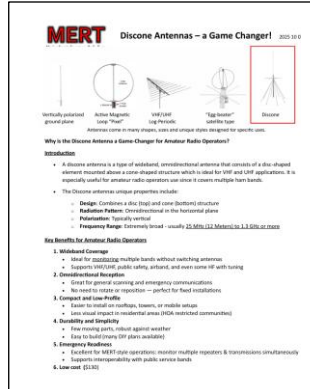
(L-R) Nick Kiddey, New Member Manager with Royce Hagerman



(L-R) Royce Hagerman with Harlan Cook packing the tent.

Training Events

During October, MERT members presented several training topics diving into unique antennas and test equipment we have in our inventory. Copies of the training resources are available by seeing Harlan any Wednesday at a Check In meeting.



(L) What are Discone Antennas?



(L) Hamstick Antenna Basics & Best Uses.



(R) Using RigExpert MATCH cable & antenna analyzer.

(R) Bill Sobel (K1WLS and KJ4CLL Trustee) presents an excellent class on using the RigExpert "MATCH" cable & antenna analyzer. It is a wonderful addition to MERT's test equipment inventory. Great job Bill!



New Member Update

We welcome Fred (N1HFH) and Jeanne (KC1CYE) Herman as new members! They are new residents to Ocala who visited the MERT Information booth at the Stone Creek community Fall Festival and talked with New Member Manager Nick Kidney (W4NFK) who invited them to visit the EOC and attend a weekly meeting.

Please welcome them to MERT the next time you see them! **Welcome Fred and Jeanne!**



(L-R) Bill Gillespie (Deputy Coordinator), Jeanne Herman, Fred Herman and Harlan Cook (Coordinator).

"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

Member Update

Today, I received a note from member Randy Williams (past CERT Liaison) on his activities this summer. Here's his fun update....

"Good morning Harlan,

As I write this note we are packing our bags for another trip back to Texas (Whitesboro) to check on the horses. It's been a very busy horse show season. The last big show for the year starts the week of Thanksgiving in Oklahoma City, called the NRHA Reining Futurity. Pam won a spot in this year's event!!

Reining horses compete according to age groups. All horses ages starts January 1 of each year regardless of their true birth date. Futurity (3 year olds) Derby (4-8) so to stay competitive you always have to horses for each age group. So that means we have 3 horses ages 2,3,8. I know strange math. We get a break in December and will be able to be home then.

Tell everyone hello, and thanks for checking on me!

Regards,

Randy Williams WD8MGZ

Ps: This is Pam and "MAGS" ("Always a Magnum") at the 100x Reining show in Tulsa. She finished in the top 6 of her classes with over 150 horses in most divisions. Pam and Mags won a place at the NRHA Reining Futurity mentioned earlier. It takes a huge team to complete in this sport. Pam is grateful for her trainer and his grooms making it all possible. It's been a fun show season traveling with the horses."



Pam Williams and her superstar horse, Always A Magnum, kept improving with every run, and bringing home checks in multiple divisions.



Pam Williams and her champion horse "MAGS" at a recent competition. *Good luck to them both in the "Nationals"!*

This is an amazing competition showing the incredible teamwork between the rider and the horse. To see the 2024 championship event winner (with the first ever women champion), visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DM-yt9k0jTk>

Good Luck to Pam Williams and "Always a Magnum"!

New Emergency Management Logistics Coordinator reports for duty!



**Robert Ethridge,
new Div. of Emergency
Management Logistics
Coordinator**

We are very pleased sharing the new Emergency Management Logistics Coordinator, Robert Ethridge, is on the job and met with the MERT members on October 15th to introduce himself and say... "Hello!".

Mr. Ethridge has considerable experience in Emergency Management and served as the MCSO Volunteer Coordinator before serving as a Sheriff's Deputy for the last 2-years.

We look forward to working with Mr. Ethridge in advancing and expanding MERT's capabilities in service to the Division of Emergency Management.

Have an idea for an article? Please email it to: KG4NXO@marionso.com.

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 30th Ave., Ocala, FL.