

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management



COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

December 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, MBA) with voice, image & data communications locally, statewide and across the United States.

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

Next Bimonthly Meeting

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

Annual Meeting Event.

All are Welcomed!

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

We Salute Bill Gillespie

This month, MERT salutes Mr. William E. "Bill" Gillespie (KW5BG) for his decade of service. His constant and steady leadership has helped guide our volunteer organization in countless ways too numerous to mention. His list of accomplishments is long, but we celebrate even more his character, wisdom, and the dedication he brought to MERT.



(L – R) Director Preston Bowlin; Bill and Vicki Gillespie; Harlan Cook

For the last decade, Bill has been a trusted advisor, a patient mentor, and a tireless worker behind the scenes. His calm presence in times of challenge and his unwavering commitment to excellence have set a standard we all strive to follow. Whether troubleshooting technical systems, encouraging and helping new volunteers, or reminding us of the bigger mission we serve, Bill's influence has been felt in every corner of our organization.



To honor Bill's contributions, leadership, dedication and mentorship, Preston Bowlin, Director presented him the Meritorious Service Volunteer Award citing his many contributions and decade of service during a special ceremony at the EOC on November 19th.



"I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year." — Charles Dickens

As he and Vicki move to their new home in Virginia and transition to new chapters in life, we pause to honor his wonderfully kind legacy. His years of support and leadership of CERT in the Del Webb Spruce Creek community along with MERT have made both organizations stronger and far more capable of serving those needing help. Bill embodies the very spirit of volunteerism—selflessness, steadiness, and deeply committed to our community.

Thank you, Bill, for your friendship, your solid counsel, your leadership, and your dedication to serve. Your impact will continue to resonate in MERT for years to come. ***We wish you and Vicki the very best in all your future endeavors!***

21 Years, a Quiet Hurricane Season and time for Thanks!



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

As MERT completes its 21st year supporting the Marion County Sheriff's Office Division of Emergency Management, I want to take a moment to reflect on our journey, acknowledge the unique nature of who we are, and express heartfelt gratitude to everyone,

First and foremost, we are thankful Florida and the United States was spared from any hurricanes this season. While it is very rare to see two hurricanes closely follow each other, I know we are all feeling very fortunate they stayed far off in the Atlantic. Clearly, a quiet season is a blessing which allowed our team to continue our efforts investing time

on improving our infrastructure while also expanding our training efforts, having fun with three Field Exercises, do some needed “house-keeping” while connecting with one another as friends.... and as a team.

This year marks 21 years of service, commitment and innovation by MERT members. What began as a plan by the Division of Emergency Management and a small group of volunteers with a shared vision and singular focus on putting trained radio operators in every shelter... has now grown into a resilient, technically advanced, and strategically vital organization. MERT has become a major resource available to Marion County’s emergency leaders because of **you** - our members.

Your dedication, your expertise, and your willingness to volunteer your time, make MERT what it is. As we have learned, there are very few organizations like MERT... so I share this with everyone:

New Members - Welcome! You’ve joined a team that values mentorship, technical excellence, and community service. Our members are here to help you learn and support you every step of the journey, but most of all, to embrace your friendship and interest in amateur radio supporting emergency communications. We also hope you find it a fun activity to learn

some new things, enjoy new activities while meeting some truly wonderful people.

Longtime members - Thank You! Your experience and long-term dedication are the foundation of our past successes. You have shown that commitment, integrity and results are core values we embrace. You've also shown that all contributions are to be celebrated and that everyone's contributions are welcomed and respected.

Members in between - Keep showing up, keep learning, and keep leading. You are helping build on past successes with new ideas and innovative recommendations which is leading us on a path to increased technical capability and excellence vital to our future success. You are building an environment of continuous improvement supporting the evolving directives we have been given today... and into the future.

As we prepare to turn the page on 2025, it is time to celebrate an outstanding year for MERT. It is even more importantly a time to spend with loved ones, family and friends with Thanksgiving and Christmas approaching. To all, I extend my sincerest wishes for a happy, relaxing, joyous and safe holiday season.

There is much to be thankful for! Thank you for being part of MERT. Thank you for your time, your talent, and your generous heart. Here's to 21 years—and to many more ahead!

Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas to All!

ARCook



MERT supporting CERT

On Halloween morning, several members volunteered to provide communications support to CERT at the 5K run/walk event at the Stone Creek community in SW Marion County. CERT's role of having several Aid Stations was backed up by radio operators who provided a crucial role in keeping race officials and emergency services updated on the progress of runners and ensuring everyone's safety during the event.

Kudos to the CERT team who have several FCC licensed amateur operators on their radio team who were stationed at the primary radio room (in the main community building)

providing a coordinated response which was ready to provide emergency support if required.

For me personally, I enjoyed the friendship, fresh air and the opportunity to have some “on air” time supporting this community’s special event. As hoped, the outcome was safe for all (nearly 200 participants!)... but wow... it was COLD! (I guess my "years are showing". LOL!)

My compliments to June Benoit, CERT Community Leader, her leadership team Pam Marcus, Norm Bouchard and others, along with the CERT Radio Captain Joel Friedman KQ4LGL for the overall organizational plan. A special salute to Phil Lewis W4EVV (MERT Repeater Mgr.) and his wife Diane W4LDL for his leadership planning the radio comm’s for the event along with Ray Woody WB6FKJ (MERT Shelter Mgr.); and, Nick Kiddey W4NFK (MERT New Member Mgr.) to volunteer at reporting stations along the route. It is fun being a MERT member!



An early race leader.



CERT member Rosemary Kerins directing participants.



Another early runner.



The Stone Creek event supported runners and walkers with moms, dads, kids and babies in strollers joining.



Harlan reporting from “Station Kilo”.



Several groups had costumes joining in the Halloween spirit.



Mom with her baby in a stroller crossing the FINISH line!



Christmas mailbox too!

Baseline Repeater Site Field Trip

Nearly everyone in our country is now accustomed to having (mostly) reliable services from the cellular telephone network, Internet Data Centers and our electrical network in their everyday lives. We’ve learned to expect those services being “on” and ready for any service request we have. But, wouldn’t you like to visit one of those sites and see what is happening “behind the scenes”? Would you also like to learn a little more on how they operate? (LOL... as an Engineer, I would also like to know what causes all those failures!)

That was the goal of MERT members visiting the Baseline repeater site on Nov. 15th who

focused on these objectives:

- Review the operational details of this site, tower and repeater facility
- Learn the security responsibilities for ingress and egress
- Review detailed Network Diagrams of both repeaters
 - KK4DFC & KJ4CLL
- FCC Log Book responsibilities
 - What is a Log Book
 - How to complete it



**Baseline Communications Facility
for KK4DFC and KJ4CLL**

Over the last 21-years, the Division of Emergency Management has made significant investments in the necessary hardware, radio systems, backup power and tower resources we need to provide reliable auxiliary communications (AUXCOMM) capabilities during emergencies. Members have supported those investments by contributing thousands of hours of volunteer time and significant technical expertise in keeping them functioning 24-hours per day should an emergency arise. (Note: Please thank Phil Lewis W4EUV for his leadership as our Repeater Manager and his excellent overview presented detailing the key equipment and operational aspects of this site.)

But knowing more details of MERT's communications facilities is a responsibility of every member who might be called upon to help in big or small ways should conditions warrant. Compliments to these members for participating: Royce Hagerman, Fred Herman, Jeannie Herman, Nick Kiddey, Phil Lewis, Santos Pagan, Ray Sherwood, Mark Weible and Ray Woody.



"I heard the bells on Christmas Day, Their old, familiar carols play, And wild and sweet, The words repeat, Of peace on earth, good-will to men!" —Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

New MERT Technical Library



MERT Technical Library

As our systems and active locations continue growing in response to the growing mission from the Division of Emergency Management, MERT is building a Technical Library to ensure every member has clear, accessible documented resources for adjusting, tuning, and repairing our diverse equipment in inventory at every location. By creating a full catalog documenting every device, we strengthen our readiness, preserve “institutional” knowledge, and help support our key objective of having reliable communications when emergencies demand consistent communications and quality.

For now, the bookcase has been placed between Station #4 and #5 in the EOC Radio Room in making it easily accessible for everyone.

We’ve outlined these resources to start moving forward with the project:

- Equipment Operation Manuals for each station’s hardware in a separate 3-ring binder
 - Radio
 - Power Supply
 - UPS
 - Antenna Tuners, Terminal Node Controllers (TNC), Sound Cards, etc.
- All SHREK and Go Kits Manuals
 - All electrical units (Radios, power supplies, Sound Cards, etc.
 - Parts & Supplies
- Repeater Site Manuals
 - ICOM D-Star & Yaesu DR-1X Repeaters
 - Power Supplies
 - Duplexers
 - Tower Antennas and cables
- All cable and switch units and every location
- Winlink Gateway/Digipeater Reference Manuals
- EOC Tower Manual, Lighting Manual, Programming Manuals, etc., etc.

The current plan is to have printed and electronic versions available. I’m pleased sharing Cindy Sheffield K9LRX and our Meeting Documentation & Deputy Logistics Manager is leading our new initiative. Thank you for your help in identifying every component and sharing them with her so they can be added to the list needing completion. ***Thank you, Cindy, for your leadership driving this key project!***



An Early Christmas

Member Ray Woody WB6FKJ (Shelter Mgr.) shares Santa visited early this year as he now has a Kenwood DH-72 HT in his personal radio equipment inventory. He shares the radio supports 2 Meters, 70 cm and Winlink digital messaging.

Ray is shown (with a big smile) in his backyard making a contact over his new HT.

Member Update

Member Bill Cummings KC2ZRZ provides this update on his very busy year with the USCGAUX.

“At FEMA’s request, I began specialized training this year to support geospatial

damage assessments during major natural disasters. This initiative aligns with FEMA’s call for USCGAUX support during Category 3+ hurricanes, significant wildfires, and tornado events. I am currently progressing through the training pipeline.



Other Leadership and Operational Roles have included:

- Flotilla Staff Officer – Communications (FSO-CM): Oversaw the restoration and modernization of communications infrastructure at the Crystal River facility, including radio and antenna systems compromised by age and flood damage. Led development of communication plans supporting routine operations and emergency response.
- Flotilla Staff Officer – Member Training (FSO-MT): Facilitated training initiatives to enhance member readiness and operational proficiency.
- Division Staff Officer – Communications (SO-CM): Provided strategic oversight and support for communications operations across four Flotillas. Ensured consistency in training standards and operational capability.
- Division Staff Officer – Information Systems (SO-IS): Maintained data integrity for member service hours and task reporting. Delivered targeted training to improve member proficiency with USCGAUX systems.

My Mission Support Activities have included:

- Conducted 50 vessel safety inspections to promote recreational boating safety.
- Served as a certified instructor for multiple public boater safety courses.

“Time cannot be packaged and ribboned and left under trees for Christmas morning. Time can’t be given. But it can be shared.” — Cecelia Ahern

- Supported Coast Guard Station Yankeetown as an AUX Culinary Assistant (AUX-CA), preparing meals for active-duty personnel.
- Collaborated with the Eastern Great Lakes District as ID Staff Officer, processing 44 member ID applications to date, including verification, tracking, and distribution.
- Will be serving as Vice Commander of USCG Aux Flotilla 15-01 for 2026. As Chief of Staff for the flotilla, I will oversee the performance of staff officers supporting the flotilla.

Bill shares his longtime support of the USCGAUX is very rewarding... but he misses being able to spend more time at MERT. We thank Bill for all he does to help keep everyone on the water safe and wish him and his wife a wonderful 2026 in their continued efforts!

Attached is a special tribute to Mr. William E. “Bill” Gillespie celebrating his decade of service to the Marion County Emergency Radio Team.

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.

Communications Update 2025 12