

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

February 2026

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, all cities in the county 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

Saturday, March 21st,
10:00 am at the EOC

All are Welcomed!

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

Wow, it's already February!



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

As the new year moves rapidly forward, I want to thank each of you for the dedication, professionalism, and heart you bring to MERT. Our strength has always come from volunteers who believe in service, who show up, and who take pride in building something that truly matters for Marion County – *today and into the future!*

This year, we continue that tradition with purpose and staying focused on challenging ourselves to resolve problems, seek improvements and raising our skills consistent with our Code of Excellence.

One of our new initiatives is the development of the MERT Technical Library—a resource that will capture our collective knowledge, document our systems, and support training for years ahead. Your expertise and contributions will make this library a cornerstone of our readiness.

We are also beginning a reorganization of our radio room to increase access to key resources (Winlink, SHARES, HF), remove clutter and add new resources for operational capability. This effort will ensure that our communications center reflects the professionalism of the team that uses it.

Another project is focused on increasing the reliability of our repeaters by investigating the use of dual power supplies with DC automatic transfer switches (ATS). This addition, in combination with the significant uninterruptable power supply (UPS) capacity at both the Transfer facility (KK4DFC & KJ4CLL) and new Sheriff's Office communications bldg. (KG4NXO-2

"When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too." - Paulo Coelho

Meter & KG4NXO-70 cm) will add a new level of reliability to all four repeaters.

Additionally, I am also extremely proud to announce that **Ray Woody, WB6FKJ**, has been selected as our new Deputy Coordinator. With so many highly skilled, experienced and dedicated members in MERT, this was not an easy decision, but Ray's steady leadership, outstanding work to enhance our shelter documentation resources, along with his long-standing commitment to service made him a great choice.

With Ray's selection, we also start a new tradition by having our Deputy Coordinator contribute monthly articles to the "Communications Update" newsletter sharing his thoughts, ideas and experiences with all of us. I am sincerely grateful to Ray for accepting this challenge.

To all our members....thank you for everything you do. I'm proud of what we've built—and even more excited for what we will accomplish together in the year ahead.

With sincere appreciation,



Harlan Cook
MERT Coordinator

From the Deputy Coordinator

"My First Two Years with MERT"

Next month will mark my two-year anniversary since joining MERT. Since "semi-retiring" and moving to Ocala in April 2021, I had been looking for a meaningful way to "give back to the community". However, nothing I was considering was resonating with me. In December of 2023, I attended a presentation in our Stone Creek community center by Preston Bowlin about the Marion County EOC. I took him up on his offer to give anyone in our audience a tour of the EOC, and that is how I discovered the MERT organization. My thoughts were that joining MERT would be a great way to enjoy ham radio again and serve the community at the same time. I signed up and attended my first Wednesday meeting in February of 2024.

I have to openly admit that I felt like a lost puppy for the first several meetings. Despite having a ham radio background, I was hearing all sorts of terminology and acronyms that were completely foreign to me. It was a fire hose of alphabet soup. It didn't help that all of my prior ham radio experience had been exclusively in the HF bands. I had absolutely zero



Ray Woody (WB6FKJ)
Deputy Coordinator

experience on the VHF/UHF bands. I vaguely knew about repeaters but had no idea how they really worked, or anything about offset and PL tones. After a few weeks, I was beginning to wonder whether I had made a mistake.

Fortunately, there were many friendly elders (young and older) that must have noticed my “Deer in the headlights” look. They told me not to worry and offered their help to help get me up to speed. They said that there is no such thing as a dumb question—*ask away!* It was comforting to hear that these folks also faced a learning curve when they first joined the group.

That was a big turning point for me. Things started to make more and more sense, and after another few weeks I felt like I had a much better grasp on things. It became much more comfortable for me to attend our meetings.

I’m telling this story because it is my hope that new volunteers coming aboard will persevere through the first “firehose of information” period. As a volunteer organization, we will always have a mix of new recruits, senior members with tons of experience, and everything in between. Everyone will work at their own pace through the **MERT Training Skill Book and New Member Orientation Guide**. But please always keep in mind that you will be surrounded by a great group of people that are more than willing to help you in any way they can.

The great thing about ham radio and EMCOMM / AUXCOMM is that there is always something to learn, new skills to acquire, and new experiences to be had. We are all in a constant learning and skill acquisition mode. That’s what keeps things interesting.

As I reflect on my two-year anniversary, I have no regrets about joining MERT. It’s been a very rewarding journey. I supported two deployments in my first year (Hurricanes Helene and Milton - just a few weeks apart). These deployments were invaluable real-time experiences that enhanced my confidence and left me with a sense of accomplishment. It has been a pleasure to collaborate with colleagues and leadership who are enthusiastic about supporting our community in times of emergencies. It has also been a pleasure to get to know our team members personally and share new experiences together as we continue to support the mission and growth of MERT.

A heartfelt thanks to everyone!

Ray Woody
MERT Deputy Coordinator

KG4NXO.com – *Your resource* for great MERT information. New resource ideas are always welcomed!

“What we have done for ourselves alone dies with us; what we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal.” - Albert Pike

Announcement of New Deputy Coordinator



(L-R) Harlan Cook KN4VRM, Coordinator congratulates Ray Woody WB6FKJ selected as MERT Deputy Coordinator at the January 2026 Annual Meeting.

Ray Woody, WB6FKJ, has been selected to serve as the **Deputy Coordinator** for the Marion County Emergency Radio Team (MERT).

Since joining, he has dedicated himself to participating in every event, activity and meeting to learn more about our critical role supporting the Division of Emergency Management. He has also served as Shelter Operator twice in gaining critical experience in our role of providing licensed, MCSO background vetted and FEMA certified emergency radio operators ready to provide back-up communications should traditional telecommunications services fail.

His support of all members, consistent participation, calm professionalism and commitment to our volunteer goals make him exceptionally well-suited to help guide our team as we expand our capabilities and support of Marion County's emergency communications mission.

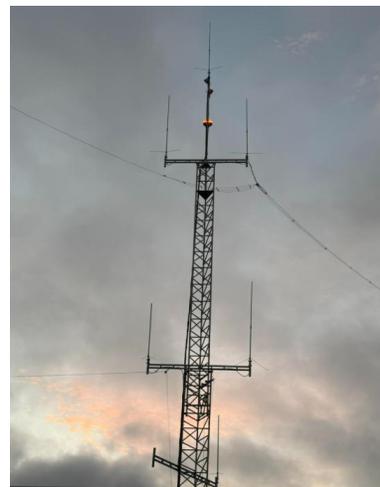
Please join me in congratulating him and offering your support as he steps into this new leadership role. Working together, we continue to build a strong, resilient, and mission-ready MERT!

EOC Tower Update

When I arrive at the EOC, I have developed a new habit to spend a few minutes in closely inspecting the EOC tower checking several items.

MERT will have a training class on what to check at our next Wednesday "Check In" meeting.

My thanks to all Members for help with conducting your own inspections so we continue to maintain the EOC tower in a safe and reliable condition!



The EOC Tower was installed in 2011.

MERT 22 Coming Soon! Mark your calendar - **April 18th – Saturday – 8:00 am till 2:00 PM**

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." – Mahatma Gandhi

Wednesday “Check In” Updates



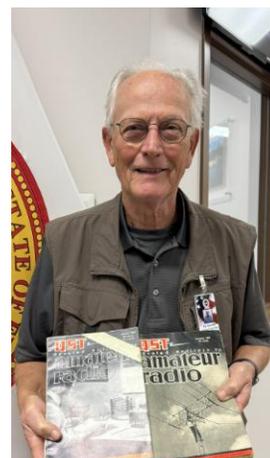
Harlan Cook, Ray Woody and Santos Pagan review the Shelter resource documents before the Jan. 14th Check In meeting for updates starting the new year. Ray is Shelter Mgr. and Santos Deputy Mgr.



MERT members receive an update from ARES Coordinator Hayden Kauffman on proposed resources for informing volunteers on activation notifications.

MERT renewed its weekly meeting schedule reviewing current events, future activities and relaunching several projects delayed by the holiday break. January 's meetings have included:

- Restarting our North Florida ARES Net (NFAN) check-in's each week.
 - Sharing news on the ARRL Northern Florida Section hosting a Town Hall Meeting for all Amateur Radio Operators in the SE Division on Friday, January 9th, at 8:00 PM
 - Sharing the Alachua County ARES/NFARC will host a training event concurrently with the Winter Field Day on Saturday, Jan. 24th offering hands-on experience.
 - MERT is planning its first 2026 Field Exercise event in NW Marion County in early March. Details TBD.
 - MERT 22 is scheduled for Saturday, April 18th from 8 am till 2 PM focused on building HF operational experience. Bill Sobel is Chairman.
 - Restarting our WEEKLY Training Nets.
 - MERT revised our NET PROCEDURES to discuss Win-link Challenge results during the 8:00 PM CERT/MERT Net.
 - MERT also added a Weekly Topic of Discussion for all operators input during the 8 PM Net.
 - Remind everyone our semi-monthly meetings are restarting with our Annual Meeting scheduled for Saturday, January 17th.
 - A special treat was shared with members at the January 14th meeting when Ray Sherwood WA9MID shared some “golden oldie” copies of **QST** magazine from January 1964 and 1967. The 1964 QST edition also was titled “50th Anniversary Edition” celebrating ARRL's creation. Everyone enjoyed “going back in time” in seeing the articles and the major advances in amateur radio since then.
- A funny note to add... One advertisement offered a “new” amateur radio for \$1,795. That is equal to \$18,760 in 2026! No wonder amateur radio was considered a “rich man's hobby” back then!



Ray Sherwood holds QST magazines from January 1964 & 1967.

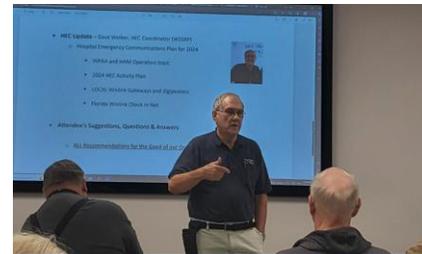
January Monthly Meeting Update

MERT conducted its Annual Meeting in concert with the January Monthly AUXCOMM/EMCOMM meeting with several extremely informative and very interesting updates from all organizations.

- ❖ MERT Harlan Cook KN4VRM MERT Coordinator
 - MERT Annual Meeting
 - MERT 22 – Saturday, April 18th
 - HF Interference Update - Solar Flux Report
 - Deployment Awards
 - March Field Exercise – NW Marion County
 - MERT Deputy Coordinator Announcement
- ❖ CERT Calendar Update Kraig Pritts KA2LHO, CERT Liaison
- ❖ HEC (Hospital ECOMM) Dave Welker W2SRP, HEC Coordinator
 - What is AI and How can it Benefit AUXCOMM & ECOMM Organizations
- ❖ ARES Hayden Kauffman N2HAY, ARES Coordinator
 - ARES 2026 Projects, Plans and Initiatives
- ❖ MBA Update Mark Weible N4GPA, MBA Liaison
 - 2026 MBA PSA Emergency Communication Plan



Kraig Pritts shares CERT activities.



Dave Welker (HEC) shares more on AI.

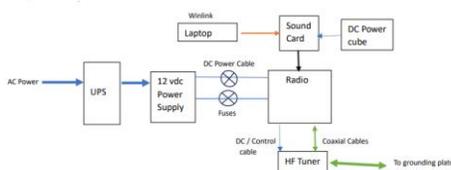


Hayden Kauffman (ARES) shares 2026 planned activities.

Thanks to all Speakers for their interesting presentations!



MERT Station #8



Schematic diagrams of all Stations are also being created for MERT's records.

Radio Room Station Inventory & Network Diagrams

A new element of the Technical Library initiative will include conducting a complete equipment inventory of every component used at each station.

In addition, the project will include the development of a circuit schematic drawing helping in future training activities along with the benefit of improving troubleshooting efforts when needed.

Our thanks to Cindy Sheffield K9LRX for leading this project!

“Volunteer service is the rent each of us pays for living - the very purpose of life and not something you do in your spare time or after you have reached your personal goals.” - Marian Wright Edelman

Deployment Recognition Certificates

During the January Monthly meeting, several members were acknowledged for their extended deployments of **over 24-hours of continuous duty** at the Shelters and EOC when assigned during an emergency activation by the Division of Emergency Management. We celebrate these members who fulfilled the primary mission for MERT service!



During January, these members were recognized for their extended deployments lasting over 24-hours at the Shelter Evacuation Centers during declared emergencies.

(Starting Top L) Mike Condon W9MNC (one of MERT's longest serving senior members); Nick Kiddey W4NFK – New Member Manager; Cindy Sheffield K9LRX – Deputy Logistics and Documentation Manager ; Phil Lewis W4EVV – Repeater Manager; Ray Woody WB6FKJ – Deputy Coordinator and Shelter Manager; Gray Moffett KC3DWY; Royce Hagerman KD7SNN – Logistics Manager.



MERT NEEDS YOU!

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

"Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they have the heart." – Elizabeth Andrew

Celebrating MERT Accomplishments

To recognize the accomplishments of the entire membership along with individual members, MERT will be creating a location in the EOC radio room where awards and certificates can be displayed in celebration. To start the process, Harlan Cook – Coordinator and Ray Woody – Deputy Coordinator framed and presented the Meritorious Volunteer Unit Award MERT received on March 31, 2023 for display. It reads:



“You are hereby awarded this Meritorious Volunteer Unit Award to acknowledge your contributions to the Marion County Sheriff’s Office. From 20 March to 29 March, your Volunteer Unit conducted a major overhaul and much needed maintenance to the amateur radio communications tower located outside of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC). During this time, the team handled rewiring and refurbishment of the radio tower to include new cabling and 3 communications antennas. The impressive level of expertise displayed by the MERT team during the installation process will ensure communications will be mission ready for decades to come. The MERT team has proven themselves to be an invaluable resource to not only our own agency, but across the State of Florida. The unit is commended for their outstanding performance of duty.” Signed by Sheriff Billy Woods.

Alachua County Training Event

On January 24th, it was truly fun joining other area radio operators participating in the North Florida Amateur Radio Club training and ARRL “Winter Field Day” activities at the Alachua County EOC. Topics included Fldigi, Meshtastic, digital-CW-voice contesting and several more topics in gaining the knowledge and skills for successful participation. Mark Weible N4GPA and Harlan Cook KN4VRM participated from MERT who sincerely thank the host, Gordon Gibby KX4Z for the invitation and opportunity to participate. *We enjoyed every minute!*



Welcome to the Alachua County EOC

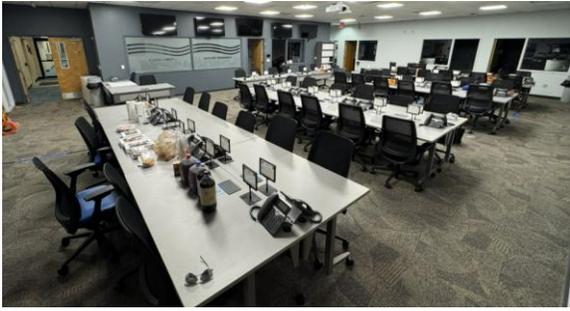


This 150 ft tower supports 2 Meter & 70 cm antennas.



(L) This is a temporary HF antenna set up in the front of the EOC resulting from a damaged coaxial cable to the OCF & End Fed HF antennas in back.

“Every person can make a difference, and every person should try.” – John F. Kennedy



Alachua County EOC



Excellent design and equipped Go Kits used during event.



All radio operations were battery powered.



(L) MERT members Harlan Cook and (R) Mark Weible participate in the Meshtastic class as part of the Training & Winter Field Day event.

The existing radio room is adjacent to the EOC but has very limited space. A new EOC with expanded AUXCOMM radio facility will open in 2026.



Harlan helps install a 200 ft coaxial jumper to start the day with NFARC member David Huckstep W4JIR.



Gordon Gibby KX4Z outlines the events and schedule for the Training and ARRL Winter Field Day event.



NFARC members review the "Phone" contacts made so far.



Harlan Cook and NFARC Member Manish review the digital contacts made.



Mark Weible and NFARC member Brett Wallace discuss the MBA Disaster Relief organization Mark leads for all the churches in Marion County.

"The quality of your life will be determined by the quality of your contribution. When you work to improve the lives of others, your life improves automatically." – Kurek Ashley

Member Update

Mark Weible N4GPA shares this update on a recent event with his family.

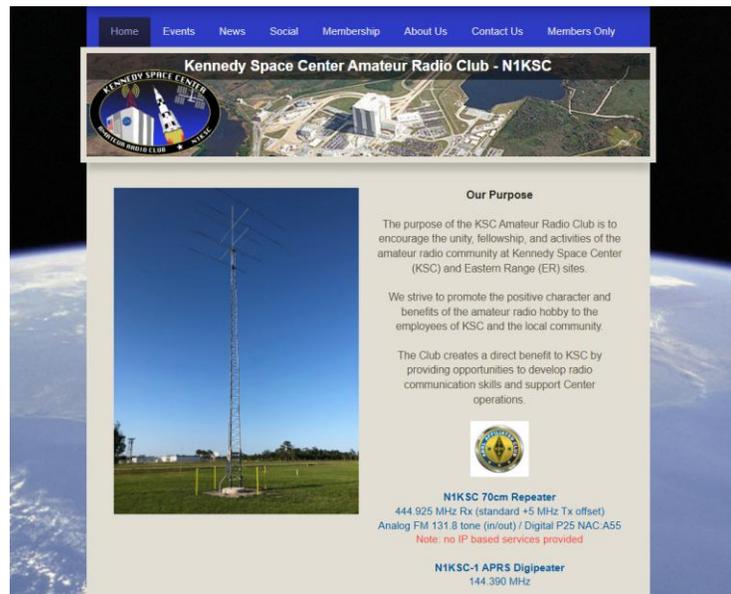
“We went to Cocoa to celebrate our grandson's birthday. Our son works at KSC and got us in to see the Artemis II rollout. Did you know that the Kennedy Space Center ham radio club supports launch communications? Yes! However, you have to be a badged employee in order to join.”

Mark, thank you for your update. It is always wonderful to see what members are doing!

Kennedy Space Center Amateur Radio Club N1KSC <https://www.n1ksc.org/>



Mark Weible and family enjoying the rollout of NASA's Artemis II.



January Training Update

This month's training topic included “Caring for MERT Portable Radios: Battery Charging & Storage Essentials”

Proper care of MERT's portable amateur radios ensures they remain reliable, in good condition, and mission-ready whenever the Division of Emergency Management activates us. While these radios are rugged, their performance depends heavily on how we store them and recharge the batteries. The class focused on two core practices every member should follow:

- ✓ Correct charging procedures, and;
- ✓ “THE Secret” - Removing batteries when radios are not in use.

Copies of the training update are available from Harlan and Ray.

MERT Portable Radio Charging & Storage 2026-01-14

Caring for MERT Portable Radios: Battery Charging & Storage Essentials

Proper care of MERT's portable amateur radios ensures they remain reliable, safe, and mission-ready whenever the Division of Emergency Management needs us. While these radios are rugged, their performance depends heavily on how we manage their batteries. This short class focuses on two core practices every member must follow:

- ✓ Correct charging procedures, and;
- ✓ “THE Secret” - Removing batteries when radios are not in use.

A. MERT radios use **lithium-ion batteries** designed for high-demand emergency communications. These batteries deliver excellent performance, but they require thoughtful handling. The most important rule is to **charge only with the approved charger assigned to that radio model**. Using the correct charger prevents over-voltage, overheating, and premature battery wear. Members should place batteries on charge after each deployment, exercise, or extended use, ensuring they reach a full charge before being returned to storage.

B. Equally important is avoiding unnecessary stress on the battery during downtime. When a radio will not be used for more than a few days, the battery **must be removed**. Storing a battery inside a powered-off radio slowly drains it, reducing long-term capacity. Removing the battery also protects the radio from accidental activation and prevents heat buildup in enclosed

Optional battery case	Battery information
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Model 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Battery life• Battery replacement

“Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.” – Arthur Ashe

CERT Activity Update

Many MERT members are also CERT members within the communities they live and help out at meetings, special events and fundraisers. In January, Harlan Cook joined the Stone Creek Community Leader June Benoit in selling tickets for the annual “Trivia Night” fundraiser held annually and shares it was fun seeing old friends and meeting new residents. All members are encouraged to support their CERT groups as often as possible.



(L) Stone Creek resident Kevin Romanelli purchasing tickets from June Benoit – CERT Community Leader.



(R) Stone Creek resident Don Cecik purchasing tickets for the “Trivia Night” fundraiser from June Benoit.

ARRL Club Update

After every Annual Meeting, we update the “ARRL Clubs” website with our Annual Meeting & Highlights” report allowing MERT access to free advertising on our group including the “MERT 22” Special Event each year.

Check out our report for the Marion County Emergency Radio Comm Team at:

<https://www.arrl.org/Groups/view/marion-county-emergency-radio-comm-team>



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

KG4NXO.com

All amateur radio operators and the general public 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.

Code of Excellence

“Our Commitment to Service, Skill, and Stewardship”

➤ ***Integrity First***

We uphold honesty, transparency, and accountability in every action and decision.

➤ ***Technical Mastery***

We pursue excellence in radio communications, infrastructure, and emergency response systems.

➤ ***Community-Centered***

We serve Marion County with compassion, readiness, and respect for all.

➤ ***Empowered Volunteers***

We foster mentorship, training, and recognition to build a resilient team.

➤ ***Clear Communication***

We speak with clarity, purpose, and professionalism—on the air and in every outreach.

➤ ***Continuous Improvement***

We innovate, adapt, and refine our systems to meet evolving needs.

➤ ***Gratitude and Recognition***

We celebrate all contributions and honor the spirit of volunteerism.

We are...

The Marion County Emergency Radio Team!