

MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office
Division of Emergency Management

COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

July 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, July 15th, 10:00
am at the EOC**

All are Welcomed!

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

Coordinator's Corner – Focusing on Results



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)
MERT Coordinator

The spirit of our intentions is shown in the results of our actions.

Every time we attend a Wednesday "Check In" meeting, join our weekly training Net's and practice sending a Winlink message, our intention is clear: we want to protect ourselves, our family and friends along with those in the shelters around Marion County when emergencies arise.

However, intentions and hopes are just ideas until they are energized by **action**. Only then do they transform into results.

As retirees, many of us face a unique mental hurdle. It can be easy to let thoughts of the unknown, physical limitations, or the fear of making a mistake stop us from trying our best and moving forward.

I know most people (including myself) find it difficult at times to do something they have never done before. This is especially true for something as challenging and unique as being a Shelter Operator. It is an impressive responsibility to handle vital emergency communications when all other commercial forms of communication have completely failed. But the antidote to fear is **action**.

No one expects you to face this challenge unprepared. That is exactly why we meet weekly to learn about new topics and practice radio communications so it becomes second nature to us. Taking these small, routine actions - breaks the cycle of hesitation and builds positive

"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

muscle memory. Good intentions alone do not hold up a communications net during a severe weather event; our true spirit lives in our effort to try doing our best!

Welcoming Our New Members into MERT

We have been incredibly fortunate to welcome many new members to MERT this year! Your choice to join our ranks is exactly the kind of action that turns into a larger community result. If you are new, the thought of an emergency deployment can feel overwhelming. At least that was my feeling the first time I activated to the West Port shelter.

Know this... you do not have to do it alone. When the call comes to deploy to an emergency shelter, answer the call. Our goal is to pair every new member with an experienced senior member who has deployed before. Here's the simple steps to take in advance.

- ✓ Get Your ID Badge - To make this happen, all new members are encouraged to apply for the Level 2 ID Badge right away. Securing this credential ensures you are cleared to enter every shelter facility and the Emergency Operations Center.
- ✓ Attend as many Wednesday "Check In" meetings as possible – Each week, the meetings combine a technical class (Understanding Coaxial Cable to SWR Measurements); a procedural review (Shelter Deployments Guide to Troubleshooting Communications Problems), then a current MERT specific topic (New EOC HF Antennas to What is SHARES?). These classes and topics prepare us to be ready to support a shelter when conditions arise.
- ✓ Review the KG4NXO.com website resources. Learning what years and years of experience and quality input has been documented on our website will make future deployments easier and less stressful knowing you have answers to questions when they arise.
- ✓ Complete the CJIS online class and receive your Certificate of Completion. It outlines vitally important security information in being a volunteer agency supporting the Division of Emergency Management.
- ✓ Join a Senior Member - This hands-on partnership is the best way to become truly comfortable and confident as a MERT Shelter Operator. Together, senior experience alongside a new member produces a positive hope for today and for the future.

July Focus Areas:

Here's some ideas moving good intentions into positive actions:

- Regularly join every weekly radio training net to build operational confidence.
- Winlink Proficiency: Send at least one practice Winlink message every week.

"If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito" — Dalai Lama

- Credential Check: Submit your paperwork for the Level 2 ID Badge.
- Complete the CJIS Certification immediately. It is now required for MERT membership.
- Hurricane Season is here. Move from passive monitoring to active readiness.
- Shelter Readiness: Verify your personal Go-Kit is packed and ready for shelter duty.

The Impact of Our Readiness

Our community depends on the results we deliver when commercial infrastructure fails. Marion County's unique geography is a wonderful factor on why we all chose to live here. But we can be affected by the ever-growing reality that storms and hurricanes are increasing in severity and the impacts they can cause.

To answer the call requires a robust, all-hands response. Our individual and collective efforts show your commitment in maintaining your stations, helping MERT do the same when needed and proving our collective action will result in keeping ourselves and the residents of Marion County safer. Thank you for your dedication, your technical skills, and your continued service to Marion County.

Remember: The spirit of our intentions is shown in the results of our actions. Your presence matters. Your skills matter. Your voice matters. Please answer the call when it comes.

With sincere appreciation,



Harlan Cook, KN4VRM
MERT Coordinator

Ps: I invite you to read the article “Honoring Those Who Answer the Call”.

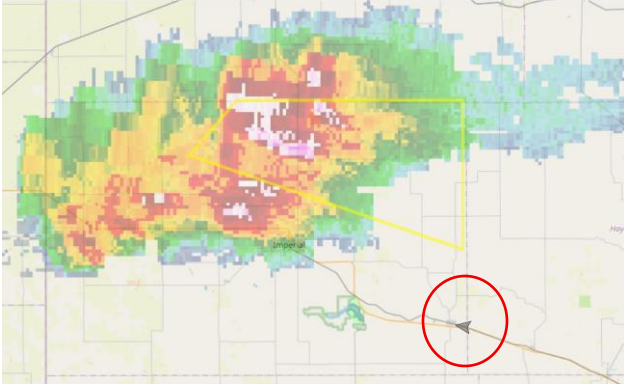
Where is our Deputy Coordinator? (He’s on vacation.)

While Ray is out-of-state earning college credits being a storm chaser, I’ll share his experiences on one afternoon during his “vacation”.

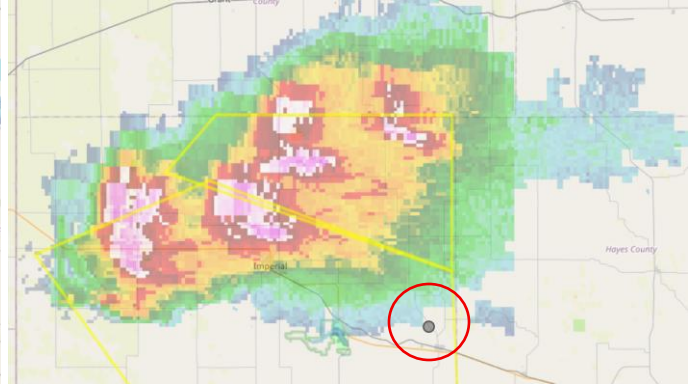
It begins.... at 2:53 PM (all times CDT) on Sunday, June 21st as he and his fellow college students were between Hayes Co. (pop. 853) and Perkins Co. (pop. 2,858) in far western Nebraska chasing a quickly intensifying storm coming out of eastern Colorado (see white and pink areas). The small circle around arrow at the bottom of the screen is the van location he and his team are in as they drive towards the storm.



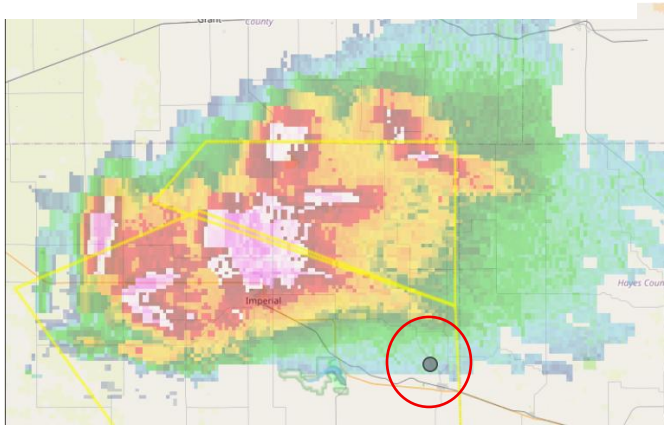
Ray Woody (WB6FKJ)
Deputy Coordinator



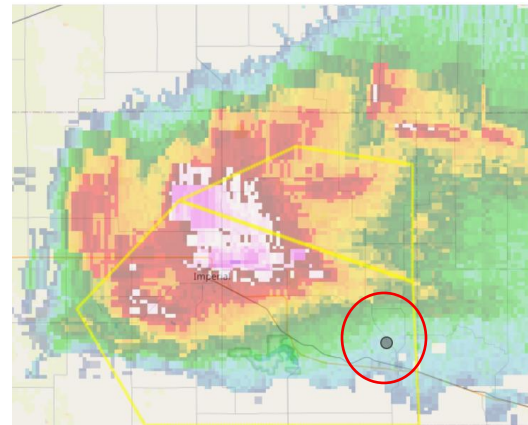
Above, the “chase” van is driving towards the rapidly developing storm cell (see white & pink areas) coming out of NE Colorado.
(See arrow denoting moving vehicle.)



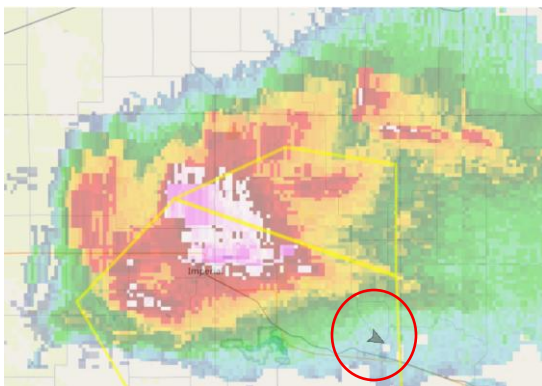
Above, his team has stopped to take weather measurements and photos as the major storm approaches at 3:02 PM
(See dot at the bottom of the screen.)



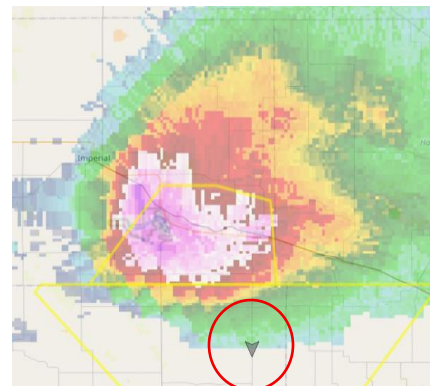
At 3:10 PM, the center of the storm cell is still organizing (see the center starting to merge) while growing in size and increasing in strength (see white/pink areas expanding). The team has not moved yet.



At 3:16 PM, the storm center continues developing a larger “cell” with the center rapidly increasing in strength. They continue taking measurements and photos.

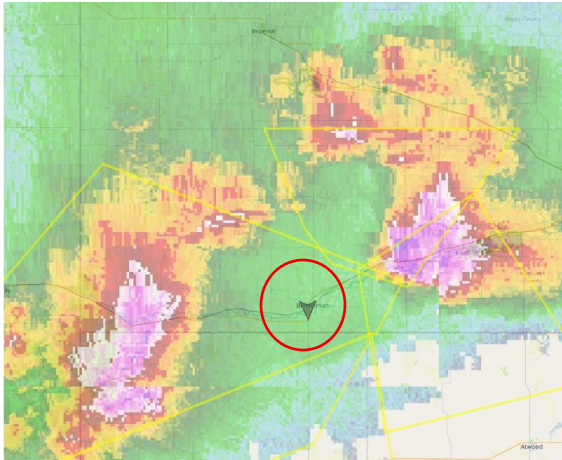


At 3:18 PM, the team is moving to stay in front... as the center has consolidated in the storm and moving SE towards their location.

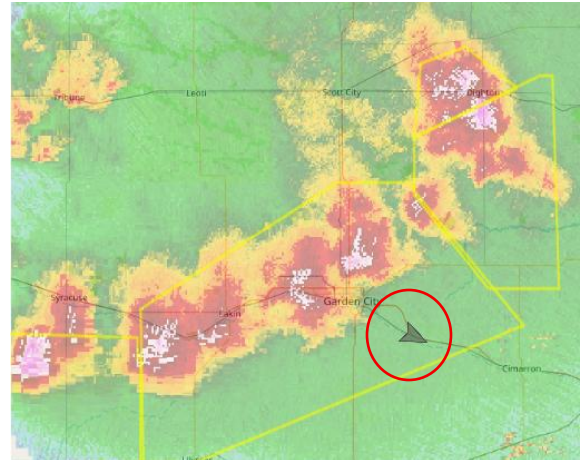


At 3:41.... The storm has turned into a powerful “supercell” with it being time to move to stay safe and in front. LET'S GO!

"Your talent determines what you can do. Your motivation determines how much you're willing to do. Your attitude determines how well you do it" — Lou Holtz

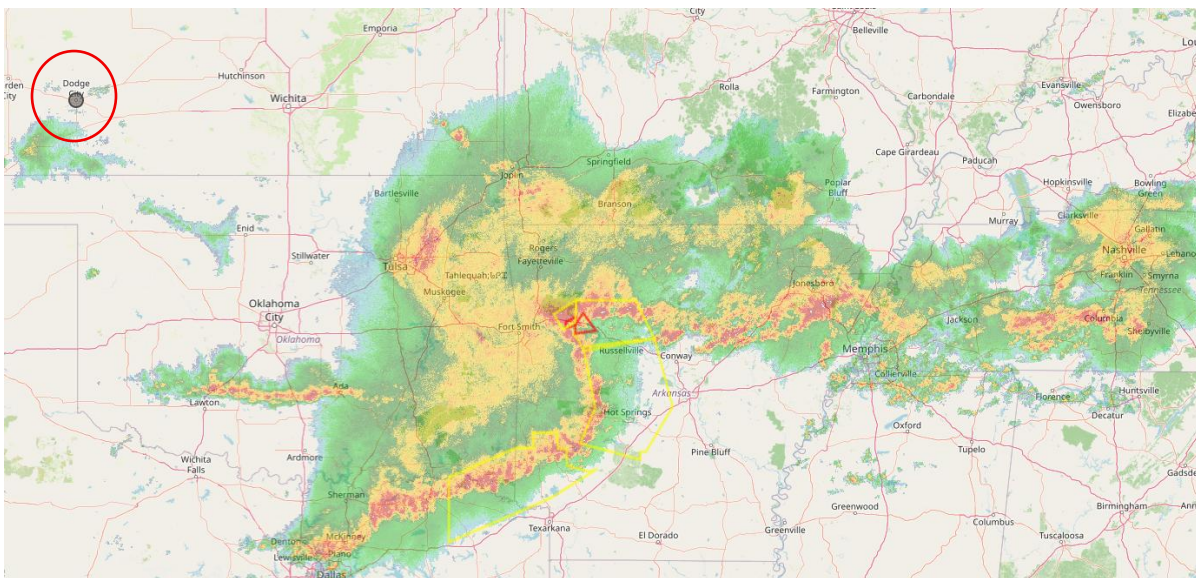


4:28 PM... They are in Kansas now. The original storm is now a “supercell” and passed on towards the east with another strong cell southwest of them. So....where do they go with two options????? Would you continue south or go southeast to monitor the stronger storm?



They went southeast.... And are now chasing the line of storms at 7:26 PM (CDT) merging into a much larger front stretching across several counties in Kansas. Also notice each cell is building a powerful core (displayed by the white and pink areas).

This is the last time I checked on Ray Sunday night. At 6:30 am (EDT) Monday, I captured the following screen shots.



At 5:33 am (CDT), Ray’s team is at a hotel in Dodge City, Kansas. As the night went on, those individual cells appeared to have merged into a huge line of very strong to severe weather rolling SE thru Oklahoma, Arkansas and into NE Texas. This is a very fast-moving storm front. The above screenshot is via the “NEXLAB” website from the College of DuPage. (Note: This college is one of the premier weather/meteorology schools in the U.S.) Also note the dot (circled) where Ray and the team stayed overnight.

“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. Remember, you don’t live in the world all of your own.” — Albert Schweitzer



The same storm at 5:35 am via the “Windy app”. It is also easier seeing the significant size and strength of this serious front across four states. Note: The white dots are lightning strikes displaying the significant power and energy in this front.



Above – The beginnings of the “supercell” Ray and his team tracked from eastern Colorado to southern Kansas.

On Monday, June 22nd, I received this 10 am reply to an email I sent Sunday.... “It’s been a lot of driving (1710 miles since we left Chicago on Friday morning). But we have had some success in accurately predicting where the outbreaks would be occurring.

We followed a supercell yesterday in northeastern Colorado. It was the best so far in terms of being able to identify the various features. The professor leading the group is excellent—very knowledgeable and experienced. I’ve learned tons of things I never knew before.”

It sounds like Ray is having a great vacation and I know he will have some incredible stories and photographs to share with us when he returns. I tracked Ray's team at:
<https://weather.cod.edu/chasing/tracker/>

HC

(Right) Ray shared this photograph of a hailstone they picked up about 30-minutes after the supercell had passed. He shared... “It’s amazing the damage that hail this size can do.” I estimate it to be at least 3-inches wide.



“You do not find the happy life. You make it!” — Camilla Eyring Kimbal

Honoring Those Who Answer the Call

Last month, MERT introduced a dedicated recognition area in the radio room honoring past, current, and future members whose leadership and actions have been formally acknowledged by the Marion County Sheriff's Office. This space will stand as a lasting tribute to their achievements and the impacts they had on our mission. This plaque headlines those members.



Honoring Those Who Answer the Call – Pat Davis



Pat Davis received the "Certificate of Appreciation" from Sheriff Woods honoring her actions in the life-saving events in Sept. 2022 during Hurricane Ian.

The section of the radio room displaying the plaque "Honoring Those Who Answer the Call," celebrates the volunteers whose commitment, character, and service continue to shape MERT's history while guiding its future.

In the June newsletter, Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody received the "Spirit of the Volunteer Award" certificate from the Sheriff Woods.

This month, MERT recognizes **Pat Davis, KQ4BRW**, for her life-saving efforts on September 28, 2022. The award was presented to Pat by Sheriff Woods at an awards ceremony and reads...

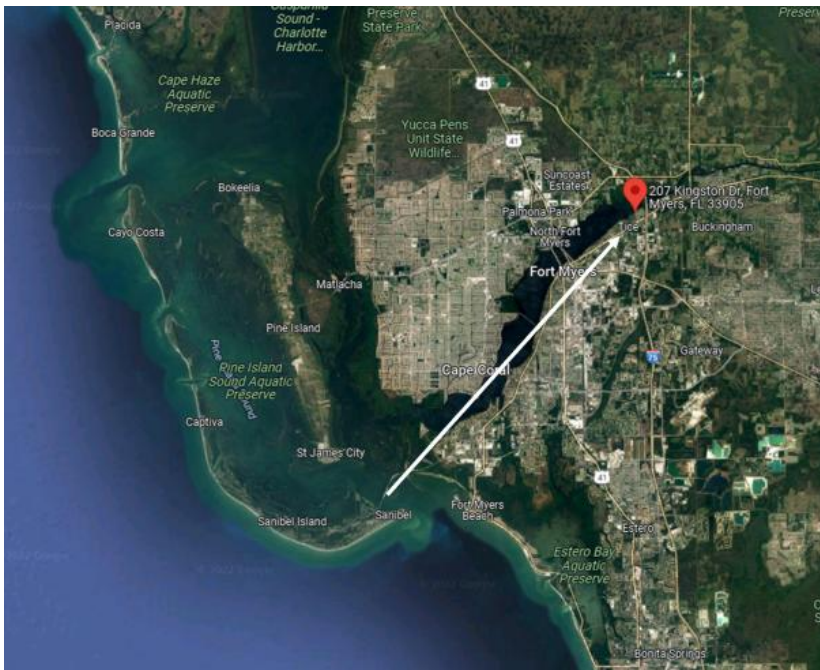
"In September of this year, South Florida was hit directly by Hurricane Ian. During this activation, the MCSO volunteer M.E.R.T. group (Marion Emergency Radio Team) was actively monitoring amateur radio communications from across the state. A radio call was received from a 65-year-old woman who was trapped on the roof of her home in Ft. Meyers, Florida and she was unable to contact 911 in Lee County. M.E.R.T. operator, Hayden Kaufman, relayed this vital information to M.E.R.T. operator, Pat Davis who was then able to contact Lee County by way of teletype and relay the location of the trapped woman. Hayden then spoke to the trapped

"The broadest, and maybe the most meaningful definition of volunteering... Doing more than you have to because you want to, in a cause you consider good." ~Ivan Scheier

woman to let her know that a search and rescue team was on the way. In the end, the woman was rescued in time and brought to safety. Unfortunately, that day there were many tragic stories of lives lost. However, thanks to your diligence and quick action, this person did not become one of those statistics. Thank you for your service not only to Marion County, but to all those in need”.

Location of Lifesaving Incident

The address of incident was 22.1 miles NE of Sanibel Island along the Caloosahatchee River.



Pat’s willingness to answer the call, her steady support of MERT training classes, and her quick action were key contributors to the outstanding teamwork and rapid response that made this life-saving event possible.

She now joins fellow MERT members in the “Honoring Those Who Answer the Call” display.

MERT proudly recognizes Pat Davis (KQ4BRW) for her dedication, her service, and her meaningful contributions to our mission. We thank her for all she has done as a valued member of MERT.

(For more information on this event, see the November, 2022 “Communications Update”.

Hurricane Preparation Time!

MERT’s RED BOOK was created over the past few years to catalog the many member experiences during the pre-activation, activation and post-activation events. It’s a guide helping MERT’s Incident Commander be successful supporting the deployed Shelter Operators and radio room personnel. It is the focus of our June training activities.



“Life is 10% what happens to me... and 90% of how I react to it!” - Charles Swindoll

Honoring Those Who Answer the Call – Hayden Kauffman (ARES)

This month, MERT also recognizes Hayden Kauffman N2HAY, for his life-saving efforts on September 28, 2022.

Hayden was an ARES EMCOMM volunteer to MERT and served at the Dunnellon EOC during Hurricane Ian. While on duty, Hayden was monitoring multiple communications resources and heard the original call for help from KE4CEI. He immediately sent an ICS-213 into the MERT radio room where Pat Davis was stationed with the vital details. As mentioned above, Pat scribed the information and delivered it to the on-duty Incident Commander in the EOC.



Hayden Kauffman received the “Certificate of Appreciation” from Sheriff Woods honoring his actions in the life-saving events in Sept. 2022 during Hurricane Ian.

MERT proudly recognizes Marion County ARES Coordinator Hayden Kauffman (N2HAY) for his support to MERT, dedication, service, and his meaningful contributions to our mission. We thank him for all he has done as a ARES volunteer supporting MERT.

(For more information on this event, see the November, 2022 “Communications Update”.)

SIMPLEX Testing Begins in late July

Preparing for emergencies is what MERT does. However, one area we have only tested once previously is if ALL REPEATERS are offline. While this may sound highly unlikely, we have read reports from other counties during previous hurricanes (Lee County – 2022) that this is exactly what happened during the major hurricane they experienced. Most interesting, it was caused by all sorts of problems – flooding, electrical shorts, mechanical failures, etc. Yes, stuff breaks and its normally always at the worst time. To be prepared, MERT must create a plan and then practice how we would continue our operations should the unthinkable occur, local repeaters go offline.

As all members know, we have a powerful communications device that can be effective if we prepare in advance by using direct transmissions (with no repeater) over the 2-Meter and sometimes the 70 cm bands. It is called SIMPLEX transmissions. However, it has a more limited radius of operation and therefore requires a different type of thinking and operation. MERT will begin SIMPLEX radio tests in July so all of us can learn more about this operation

and then help us create a PLAN on how MERT operators can use it during emergencies to help stay informed... and continue supporting the Division of Emergency Management.

More to come soon!

Division of Emergency Management Volunteer Changes Announced

The Division of Emergency Management announced several changes for all MERT volunteers. They include:

- ✓ New uniforms with “Volunteer” on them.
- ✓ Requirements to complete the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) on-line class.
- ✓ Requirements to sign authorizations for the MCSO to complete annual background checks.
- ✓ Requirements to have a doctor certify they are fit and capable in completing the duties of a Volunteer.

Ray and I sincerely thank every member for their support as we received no notifications of these changes in advance.

New Uniform Time



(Top Left) Gary Nicholas KQ4HQD receives his new uniform from Ray Woody (Deputy Coordinator) and Harlan Cook (Coordinator).

(Top Right) Dave Gustufson WB9EEH receives his new uniform.

(Bottom Left) Gavin Karelitz K2ETC receives his new uniform.

Our apologies to the remaining members receiving their new shirts as we had a “camera melt down” and lost the photographs.

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

Wednesday Check In Meetings - June



(Left) Senior member Bill Sobel (K1WLS) shares his “portable soldering unit – propane gun” he uses whenever he needs to make a coaxial cable connector without having 110 vac. He explained the “trick” is having a unit with a variable trigger to not over-heat the connection



(Left) Division of Emergency Management Director Preston Bowlin shares more information and takes questions on the new MERT membership requirements.



(Left and below) Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody (WB6FKJ) presents the finding of the MERT Technical team tests at two shelters. He thanks Santos Pagan and Ray Sherwood for their excellent assistance.



(Left & above) MERT’s technical team (Ray Woody WB6FKJ, Santos Pagan KR4FEP and Roy Sherwood WA9MID) identified several issues at two shelters - Lake Weir High School and Madison Street Elementary on June 9th. Issues included corroded coaxial connectors, water soaked/corroded cable, a broken antenna and indoor coaxial cable used outdoors on the roofs of both schools.

A detailed repair plan is being developed and will be submitted for funding to make all the repairs and replacements.



(Left) Harlan Cook, MERT Coordinator and Ray Woody, MERT Deputy Coordinator have a “work party” at the EOC.

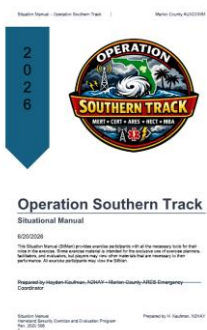
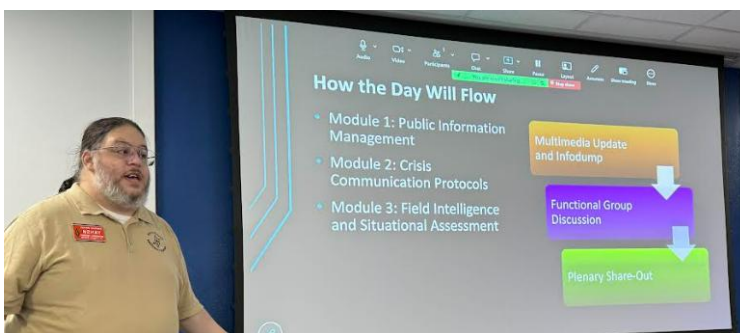
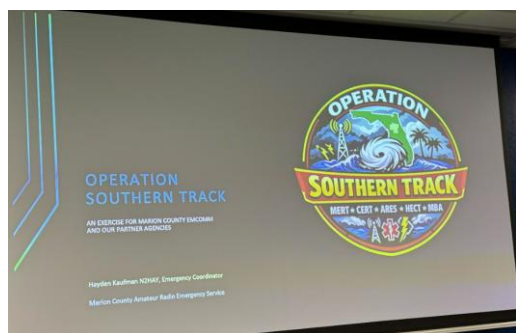
“As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands — one for helping yourself, the other for helping others.” – Audrey Hepburn

ARES Exercise - Operation Southern Track

On June 20th, Marion County ARES presented a fun table-top exercise named “Operation Southern Track”. Volunteers from Marion and Lake County EMCOMM and AUXCOMM groups included ARES, MERT, Hospital Team, MBA Disaster Relief and CERT.

The exercise was very well prepared and obvious Hayden put much thought and time into building the timelines, events and scenarios which I felt were a realistic cascading set of challenges. The exercise was documented in a 21-page plan with impressive videos, custom audios and actual Alert messages adding to the "realness" of the exercise.

It was a well thought out event in weaving each of the EMCOMM groups into the overall experience with MERT's AUXCOMM team. It included group and individual activities building a coordinated response of actions and activities. Another item was the event went a full hour over the planned end time showing the interest and level of participation by attendees. I am glad to report MERT had 7 members participating (from senior to new members).



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.

Communications Update 2026 07

"Remember that the happiest people are not those getting more, but those giving more." - H. Jackson Brown Jr.