

# MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team



Marion County Sheriff's Office  
Division of Emergency Management

## **COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE**

**October 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, January 16th,**  
**10:00 am at the EOC**

**All are Welcomed!**

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

### **Coordinator's Corner**



Harlan Cook (KN4VRM)  
MERT Coordinator

September brought a strange mix of emotions — moments of progress, unexpected challenges, and experiences ranging from very joyful to deeply sad. It reminded me how dynamic our work is, how important everyone is and how much heart our volunteers bring to every situation.

#### **A Quiet Hurricane Season — Thanks to El Niño**

This year's "super El Niño" in the Pacific has had a significant impact on weather patterns across the globe. Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody has an excellent update on this topic in his article.

#### **Internet Restored — Training Renewed**

I'm very pleased to share that the Internet issues affecting our radio room have been fully resolved. This allowed us to resume regular Winlink training and restore EchoLink service on KJ4CLL. Many people contributed to this fix, especially Hayden Kaufman (ARES Coordinator), who provided the new PC for EchoLink.

With connectivity restored, we were able to conduct hands-on training using Sheriff's Office PCs, our Mobilinkd TNCs, and SHREK radio hardware. It was a joy to watch our newest members experience the excitement of sending and receiving digital messages over the airwaves.

#### **Honoring Service and Achievement**

Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody and I also completed the MERT Honor Wall — a tribute

*"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*

recognizing the achievements and contributions of our members and Sheriff's Office leadership. This display reflects the pride and professionalism behind MERT's success today.

### **Teamwork in Action**

Challenges arise unexpectedly, and they often reveal the strength of our teamwork. When the KJ4CLL repeater became a "stuck key," Ray Woody, Bill Sobel (KJ4CLL Trustee), and I responded quickly and resolved the issue. Thank you, gentlemen, for your dedication and skill.

### **Celebrating Director Bowlin**

On a happy note, nearly 20 members attended Director Preston Bowlin's retirement event at the EOC. Other participants included Sheriff Woods, County Commissioners, and City of Ocala officials joined in recognizing his decade of leadership.

### **A Major Loss to Our MERT Family**

Sadly, we close this month with the passing of Mike Condon (W9MNC). Mike joined MERT in 2015 and made significant contributions to documenting shelter resources in helping every activated member succeed as a Shelter Operator. I once teased him that he was our first "Shelter Manager," and it brought a wonderful smile to his face.

Mike was an always proud U.S. veteran... very knowledgeable ham operator and a very kind, generous person to all. We honor him with a "Silent Key" tribute later in this newsletter.

### **Your Presence Matters**

Thank you for remembering that the spirit of our intentions is reflected 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 to all,



Harlan Cook KN4VRM  
MERT Coordinator

### **MERTrak**

A note to remind all members on the importance of reporting all amateur radio activities, meetings, Thursday NET participation, preparing for FCC licenses and even reading the "Communications Update" are reportable events. It is important and thank you for logging all your volunteer hours!



*"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*

## **Deputy Coordinator Update**

### **RECORD-SETTING 2026 ATLANTIC HURRICANE SEASON: A SHIFT IN RISK**

As we move through the final weeks of September 2026, this year's Atlantic hurricane season is setting unprecedented new records — specifically for inactivity.

We have passed the historical climatological peak of the season without a single hurricane forming. To date, only seven short-lived and weak tropical storms have developed. No Atlantic season since the beginning of the satellite era in 1966 has gone this deep into the year without its first hurricane. The previous record was

set on September 11th, shared by Gustav (2008) and Humberto (2013). Looking beyond satellite data, one would have to go back more than a century to 1914, which holds the official record as the quietest Atlantic season with just one named storm and zero hurricanes.

This historic atmospheric calm stems primarily from the massive, still-strengthening Super El Niño in the Pacific Ocean. El Niños typically produce higher-than-normal upper-level wind shear across the Atlantic basin. This year's exceptionally strong pattern is generating extreme vertical shear, effectively tearing apart nascent disturbances before they can organize into hurricanes. Furthermore, a very weak temperature gradient between the lower and upper atmosphere has created widespread atmospheric stability and dry, sinking air across the tropical Atlantic, a phenomenon unseen on this scale since 1940.

Advanced predictive models do not project any tropical development in the Atlantic, Gulf, or Caribbean for at least the next 10 days, taking us into mid-October.

Conversely, the Eastern Pacific tells a completely different story. The immense oceanic heat feeding the Super El Niño has triggered a hyperactive season there, running roughly 80% above average with 16 named storms, 6 hurricanes, and 4 major hurricanes. At one point, three hurricanes (Lowell, Karina, and Marie) coexisted simultaneously in the Eastern and Central Pacific.

However, a quiet Atlantic tropical season does not mean our team can relax. We must soon shift our vigilance toward the upcoming winter. Super El Niños typically drive an active subtropical jet stream, steering storms along a more southerly track directly across the Gulf Coast and the southeastern states. While the projected above-average rainfall could help erase our persistent regional drought, a Super El Niño also substantially increases the risk of severe winter weather and tornadoes across central and southern Florida. We saw this dangerous pattern manifest historically during the winters of 1983, 1998, and 2016.



**Ray Woody (WB6FKJ)**  
**Deputy Coordinator**

*“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*

As an emergency response organization, it remains our core duty to ensure that MERT stands fully prepared to respond to any crisis, regardless of season or reason.

Ray Woody  
MERT Deputy Coordinator

## **Director Bowlin's Retirement – September 2<sup>nd</sup>**

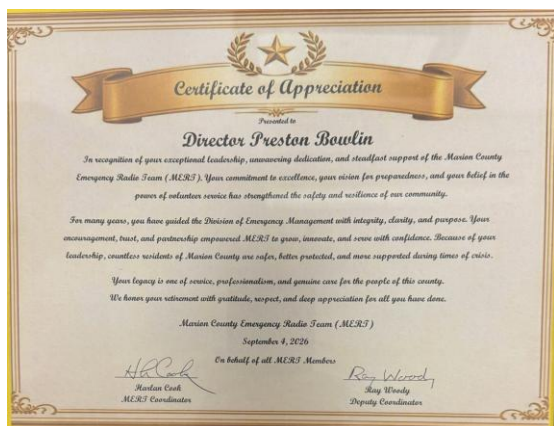
Our thanks to all the MERT, HEC, ARES and MBA Disaster Relief members who attended.



(Above) Director Bowlin is presented a Retirement plaque and personal card sent by Past Coordinator Leon Jurcyszyn.



(L) Director Bowlin is presented his "Honorary FCC License" - MERT#1 - and "Appreciation Certificate" by Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody. It reads... "In grateful recognition of your years of service, leadership, dedication and commitment to MERT. Your contributions to emergency communications and public service have made a lasting difference to this team and the community we serve."



(Above) Director Bowlin displays his "MERT Member Certificate of Appreciation" from Ray Woody and Harlan Cook.

*"Great opportunities to help others seldom come, but small ones surround us every day." – Sally Koch*



(Center) Former CERT Coordinator Beverly Case attended the festivities offering her personal congratulations and thanks to Director Bowlin's leadership and support to all volunteers supporting the Division of Emergency Management.

(Right) Director Bowlin sharing his appreciation received by both CERT and MERT over his career as Director of Emergency Management. **Note:** MERT created a lasting "Tribute Plaque" of his service which hangs in the radio room for all to see.

## **Communications Update Editor — Invitation to Grow & Contribute**

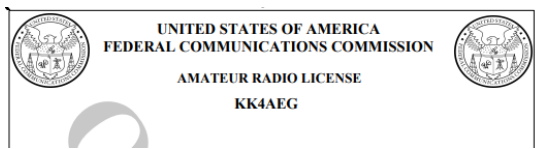
The *Communications Update* has been a very rewarding project for me for nearly seven years, and now it's time to open the door for new leadership and fresh perspectives. We're inviting a volunteer to take on the role of Editor and help shape the next chapter of MERT's monthly newsletter. Training and support will be happily provided.

For me, sharing the stories of our members, events, and activities each month — in both words and photographs — has been a true joy. Serving as a "history writer" for MERT has been a meaningful part of my volunteer work, and I know you will find the same satisfaction in helping preserve our story. The future of MERT is bright, and this role is a wonderful way to be part of that momentum!



**The first edition of the  
*Communications Update*  
was in February, 2020.**

## **New Trustee for KK4AEG Needed!**



MERT needs a new Trustee for repeater **KK4AEG!**

**So, what are the core Responsibilities of a Trustee?**

The primary responsibility is to ensure FCC compliance at all times in verifying MERT's repeater

operates within all FCC Part 97 regulations. Another responsibility is to ensure the designated control operators (MERT Repeater Manager and Deputy Repeater Manager(s) are qualified control operators who can be trusted to run the station properly.

An important note is this - both the trustee and the control operator(s) share responsibility

*"The spirit of our intentions is shown in the results of our actions" — Harlan Cook*

for correct operation in compliance with FCC R&R's.

Additional responsibilities include:

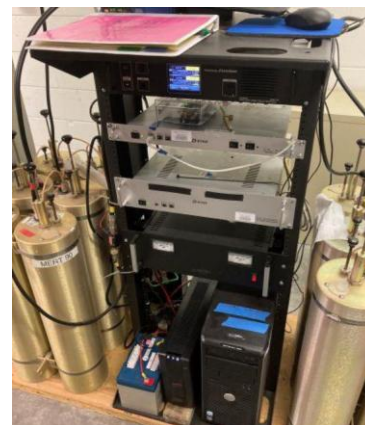
Confirming MERT's FCC license is active and renewed in a timely manner (licenses expire every 10 years);

Communicate with the Coordinator and Deputy Coordinator in submitting any modifications when club officers, addresses, or Trustees change;

Keeping contact information current in the FCC ULS;

Ensuring proper documentation is filed through a "Club Station Call Sign Administrator" (ARRL VEC, W5YI-VEC, etc.) rather than directly with the FCC;

Serves as the FCC Point-of-Contact; and, maintains the "Station Log" ensuring all changes, tests, repairs and inspections are documented during every visit to the facility.



**KJ4CLL & KK4DFC Repeaters**

MERT thanks these members for their leadership in being current Trustees:

**Bill Sobel** – KJ4CLL; **Phil Lewis** – KK4DFC; and, **Harlan Cook** – KG4NXO.

**Interested?** Want more information? Please contact Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody (or Harlan when he returns from vacation in early-November).

### **New Deputy Repeater Managers Announced**



**Gavin Karelitz (K2ETC) (Top) and Brian Lewis (AE1US) receive their Deputy Repeater Manager Certificates.**

MERT is pleased to announce the appointment of two new Deputy Repeater Managers who will be assisting Phil Lewis – W4EVV (MERT Repeater Manager) in managing, testing and maintaining all Sheriff Office repeaters in compliance with FCC R&R's.

Members Gavin Karelitz (K2ETC) and Brian Lewis (AE1US) volunteered to participate in teamworking with Ray in providing round-the-clock support. We are very appreciative for both members willingness in supporting MERT's operations

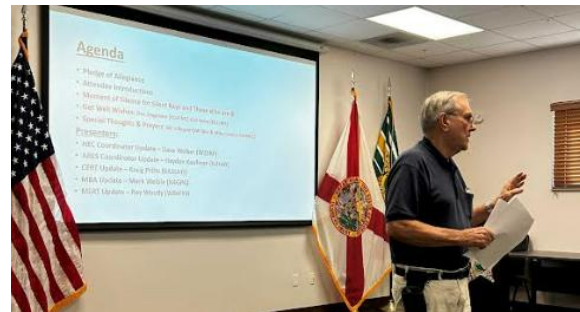
*"As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands — one for helping yourself, the other for helping others." – Audrey Hepburn*

## **Semi-monthly AUXCOMM/EMCOMM Meeting Update**

Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody shares this update.

Dave Welker's HEC update included a review of the results of HEC's recent Drill Exercises that included participants from MERT, ARES, MBA, and CERT. These drills included Voice simplex and P2P Packet WINLINK exercises.

He also provided a flyer to attendees that describes the JXTZ Bluetooth 5.3 Transmitter/Receiver. This device can provide a simple and inexpensive wireless connection between the radio and any make of hearing aids that have Bluetooth connectivity. It's a great addition for older operators that are experiencing various levels of hearing loss, enabling them to hear weak signals that they may otherwise have missed.



Hayden began his presentation by awarding Gray Moffit with a special ARES pin as an expression of his gratitude for Gray standing in for him while he was hospitalized (see photo).

Among the other many topics Hayden discussed were the following:

- Annual Sumter County Run - Saturday , Nov. 7th. This is the 11th Annual Hearts for Hospitals
- Bicycle Challenge. There are opportunities for radio support of this event for anyone interested.
- 51st Annual Mt. Dora Bike Ride - October 10 -11. Selective opportunities for radio support are also available for this event.
- Upcoming Education Opportunity - PC Basics - Saturday, Nov. 14 at Green Clover Hall.

Then he announced that ARES plans to sponsor the following training opportunities in the coming weeks and months. This particularly caught my interest as they are all relevant to MERT (I intend to sign up for as many of these as possible).

- ✓ NCO Training
- ✓ Digital Voice Modes - DMR, D-Star, P25
- ✓ Post-Event Documentation - The ICS Way
- ✓ Field Operations

Dates for these are TBD, and depend on adequate demand.



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

Hayden also discussed the new **FDEM FLEX website**. He pulled up the website and reviewed some of the key features and provided a few how-to-use examples.

He also mentioned the North Florida AUXCOMM Working Group initiative and recommended that a renewed effort is needed to continue the important work of this group.



Mark Weible presented more news on his MESHTASTIC activities. He brought some new informational flyers and handed them out to all attendees. He discussed his plans to conduct more testing in various communities to demonstrate how Meshtastic works and its increased effectiveness as the user population increases.

Marion Mesh Meeting will be held on Saturday, November 7th, from 9:00 - 11:00 AM, at the MBA Office at 1520 NE St., Ocala 34470.

On behalf of MERT, I presented all of the MERT agenda topics (repeater upgrades, new HF antennas, SHREK Kit upgrades, Shelter updates, and Stone Creek Fall Festival New Member Drive tent and display).

There were 17 attendees and I believe all enjoyed our time together learning more on each groups AUXCOMM/EMCOMM activities.



### **A Call for Hope and Prayers**

Our immediate past Deputy Coordinator, Bill Gillespie, a good person, trusted friend to many and a dedicated servant to MERT, has had his surgery removing his kidney and clot after a cancer diagnosis recently.

In moments like these, the strength of our MERT family matters. Please join me in lifting him up — for courage, healing, and comfort in the days and weeks ahead.



Bill, all of MERT with you with tons of positive thoughts and prayers!

*"Where there is hope, there is faith. Where there is faith, miracles happen." — Unknown*

## September Meeting Photos



*"I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something." – Edward Everett Hale*

## **MERT Honoring Those Who Answer the Call**

The “Honoring Those Who Answer the Call” display is a permanent tribute to the men and women whose dedication, leadership, and quiet acts of service have shaped MERT’s identity. Each plaque represents an achievement or moment when someone stepped forward, lifted others, and strengthened MERT’s auxiliary communications (AUXCOMM) mission.

This wall stands as a living history of MERT’s most impactful contributors. It recognizes those who:

- Gave countless hours to training and readiness.
- Helping guide and build systems and capabilities that will endure for decades.
- Leading with integrity and steadiness during emergencies.
- Invested in helping volunteers succeed, grow and mentor others toward success.
- Upheld the values that make MERT a respected and trusted partner in public safety.
- Fostered and supported the creation of a premier AUXCOMM organization.

Every name on the wall tells a story of commitment. Together, the plaques form a legacy that inspires current members, welcomes new volunteers, and reminds all who enter the radio room that MERT’s strength comes from people who choose to serve when it matters most!

This is not a “wall of fame.” It is a wall of gratitude, a wall of service, and a wall of continuity — honoring those whose contributions will echo through MERT’s future long after the moment of recognition has passed.



In early September, MERT Coordinator Harlan Cook and Deputy Coordinator Ray Woody team- worked the completion of the Honor Wall recognizing those members, Sheriff Office staff and fellow amateur radio operators who have made major contributions to MERT’s successes in the past and present.

Ray and I invite everyone to stop and take a moment to learn each persons story and effort supporting the “Wall of Honor”.

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



**The Wall of Honor Wall now includes this tribute to Past Director Preston Bowlin.**

### **Past Coordinator Leon Jurcyszyn Shares an Update from Michigan**

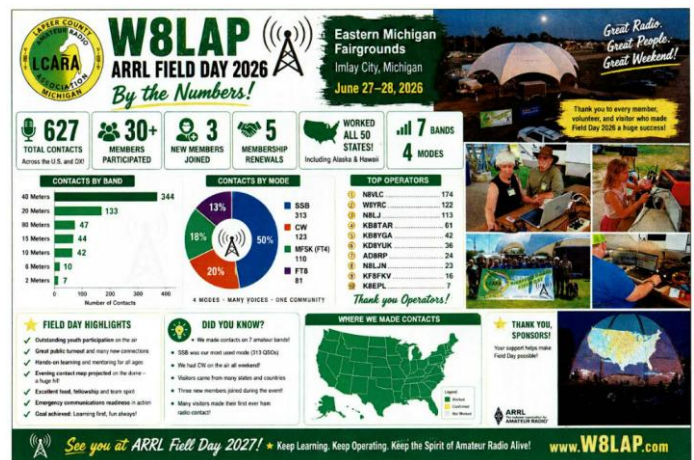
Leon sent this update on the Club he joined in Michigan participating in a 24-hour Field Day event. LCARA has existed for 70-years and is an enthusiastic participant in the ARRL Event!

Thank you so much Leon for sharing these photos about your new amateur radio activities!



**MERT** has a new email - Please note it for the future - [MERT.AUXCOMM@gmail.com](mailto:MERT.AUXCOMM@gmail.com)

*"Amateur Radio is the most powerful communications service available to the private citizen anywhere on Earth—or even above it!" - ARRL*



## Honoring Michael Neil Condon (1943 – 2026)

I am sad sharing Senior Member Mike Condon (W9MNC) became a Silent Key early Sunday morning, September 20<sup>th</sup>.

Mike always welcomed any opportunity to share ideas, express his feelings (politely) and share more on MERT's history when any opportunity arose. He genuinely enjoyed every opportunity to be on the radio, especially the HF bands, surfing the globe for contacts and conversations while inviting all to answer his "CQ, CQ, CQ - W9MNC".

Mike became a member in 2015 and strongly supported its mission for years until health issues arose. Even then, he contributed in many small ways to help us grow, improve skills and advance our AUXCOMM objectives.



Jan. 17, 2026 – Mike is awarded his Certificate and uniform pin for many Shelter Activations over the years. He told me... "It's about time!"

*"Volunteers don't get paid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless." – Sherry Anderson*

MERT thanks all who participated in honoring this wonderful member and friend at the Silent Key ceremony at the end of the CERT-MERT Training NET on Thursday, September 24<sup>th</sup>

**Michael Neil Condon – You will be missed!**



April 1, 2026 – Mike was a life-long student who always enjoyed learning and sharing. In this meeting, he introduces more about the “M1ke” device from Shark RF which is an internet-connected hotspot for ham radio.



April 18, 2026 – Mike attended the Wednesday meeting and offered a couple welcomed thoughts!



(L-R) MERT members Mike Condon & Jim Lowe with Hayden Kaufman (ARES Coordinator). Mike loved amateur radio and MERT's AUXCOMM mission. He participated in Operation Southern Track on Saturday, June 20, 2026.

# MERT

Marion County Emergency Radio Team

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 30<sup>th</sup> Ave., Ocala, FL.

Communications Update 2026 10

*“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, What are you doing for others?” -  
Martin Luther King Jr.*