

LIVING in the community

By: Vicki Coker

Talking wireless around the world

Livingston—Want to help in times of emergencies? How about talking to the International Space Station or communicate with satellites? Come learn about how the Upper Livingston Wireless Association can help get anyone an Amateur Radio license.

The Upper Lake Livingston Wireless Association (ULLWA) meets the second Thursday of each month at 7 p.m. at the Polk County Office of Emergency Management at the old hospital on E. Church St. All hams are invited to check in.

The ULLWA is a non-profit organization is made up of members that are interested, licensed Amateur Radio operators from the counties located around Lake Livingston, and who wish to conduct club programs and activities for the advancement and welfare of amateur radio, as well as, educate prospective Amateur Radio operators about public service to their communities. It operates under the ARRL or the National Association of Amateur Radio.

Amateur Radio (also called Ham Radio) describes the use of radio frequency for purposes of non-commercial exchange of messages, experimentation, self-training, private recreation, radio sport, contesting, and emergency communication. The term "Amateur" is used to specify "a duly authorized person interested in radioelectric practice with a purely personal aim and without pecuniary interest".

National governments regulate technical and operational characteristics of transmissions and issue individual stations licenses with an identifying call sign. Prospective Amateur Operators are tested for their understanding of key concepts in electronics and the host government's radio regulations. Radio Amateurs use a variety of voice, text, image, and data communications modes and have access to frequency allocations throughout the RF spectrum to enable communication across a city, region, country, continent, the world, or even into space. Some of the focal areas amateurs pursue include, radio propagation study, technical experimentation, and radio contesting, public service communication

Polk County Emergency Coordinator Robert Herron, KD5UAD, described how radio operators are able to transmit all over the world using a system known as repeaters. "A radio repeater is a combination of a radio receiver and a radio transmitter that receives a signal and retransmits it, so that two-radio signals can cover longer distances. A repeater sited at a high elevation can allow two stations, otherwise out of line-of-sight propagation range of each other, to communicate. The ULLWA has three repeaters that they use within the area that reaches as far as they need for transmitting."

President Dennis Teal, AA5DT, says this about the association, "The Amateur Radio operator has a motto of "We always communicate." When the electric grid, internet or other services are down, we can always talk." When storms, fires, flooding or any emergency situation happens, the ULLWA members are on hand and ready to serve the community, state and even national disasters.

During the meeting, members related how they were able to communicate during life-threatening situations when other means were not available especially during Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Ike. One recent event involved the rescue of residents in southwest San Jacinto County during the flooding of Hurricane Harvey. San Jacinto County Emergency Coordinator Michael Smith, KO5K, said, "A swift-water rescue team from Hudson Volunteer Fire Department went to San Jacinto County to help with the high-water evacuation effort there. Prior to leaving their home base, Amateur Radio repeaters from Angelina and Trinity counties were linked, and an emergency communication network was established. When their boat flipped over during their rescue efforts, the situation was known almost immediately and the call went out for their rescue. The men and boat were in the water when a second swift-water team from Punkin/Evergreen Volunteer Fire Department was called in and also flipped their boat into the water. Now two rescue teams and two boats had to be rescued. Both of these teams



WORKING THE SPIRIT RIDE EVERY NOVEMBER—ULLWA members Net Control Robert Herron/KD5UAD and Charlie Cline/K5CLi help monitor and check on bicyclists as they enjoy the gorgeous scenery of East Texas and help raise funds for The annual Spirit Ride. This event is one of many that ULLWA members volunteer their time and services.

made it to safety with the aid of their land-based crews. The boats were eventually retrieved and were put back into service and were able to help other flooded evacuees. These are situations where all members of the community, radio operators, emergency personnel and first responders work together to help our communities."

The ULLWA are also members of the WEATHERNET which has trained spotters that watch and communicate concerning dangerous weather situations. With over one million licensed and trained radio operators, all areas of emergencies can be handled and public services can be communicated to millions of people.

Most of the members of the ULLWA are licensed, trained ARES volunteers. The Amateur Radio Emergency Service (ARES) is a corps of trained amateur radio operator volunteers organized to assist in public service and emergency communications. It is organized and sponsored by the American Radio Relay League and the Radio Amateurs of Canada. Communication failures have been a defining part of natural disasters. ARES groups are volunteer amateur radio operators who come together for the common purpose of providing emergency and/or auxiliary communications service to public safety and public service organizations. Most individual ARES units are autonomous and operate locally. Amateur Radio operators belonging to ARES (and its predecessor, the Amateur Radio Emergency Corps) have responded to local and regional disasters since the 1930s, including the attacks on September 11, 2001 and Hurricane Katrina. ARES members attend regular meetings with FEMA and Red Cross to keep informed of the techniques, language and perspectives of emergency services.

Because the ULLWA is a non-profit organization they are dependent on fundraisers and grants. Recently an older ambulance was donated to the group and they immediately started working on it to make it a portable communications van. Member Walter Teal, KG5CMC, stated, "It needs a lot of work, but we are excited because it is mobile and we will be able to use it for future events or emergencies." They also received grant monies to help with updating equipment and maintenance of equipment. One grant they used to hold Amateur Radio classes for Onalaska ROTC students, helped them get licensed and even bought them each a radio to continue their communication skills. They have also been able to set up radio systems for five local fire departments.

"It's so easy to set up an Amateur Radio communication site, I recently used a piece of wire, a battery and a small radio, connected it all together and could talk all over the world," added San Jacinto County Coordinator Smith. It's very easy and can be very affordable to establish a transmission site. Smith once affixed three posts together on Lowe's parking lot, added a battery and radio and was able to communicate with another Ham in Massachusetts.

"We also help with communications at local events such as the annual Spirit Ride and the Triathlon recently held in Onalaska," stated member Beverly Thompson, KG5AWU. "And of course any emergency situations that may arise, we are able and ready to be of service," she added. She related that during Hurricane Rita and Hurricane Ike several men and their wives stayed in the radio room for as much as three days at the Emergency Management office to help transmit and receive important communications to shelters, Red Cross, law enforcement, fire departments and first responders.

"One fun thing we do each year is we set up our radio so children can talk to Santa and find out where he is and what he is doing during the Christmas season. We work hard but we have fun too," added Beverly.

Polk County Emergency Management Director Larry Pitts said this about the ULLWA, "The Emergency Management department has made the ULLWA group part of our team as they are critical to emergency situations when all other communications are not functioning. They use their own personal equipment and they are capable of establishing communications inside or outside during any emergency situation. They are a very important key to the safety and stability of our community."

The ULLWA offers anyone interested in amateur radio classes and help with obtaining their license can call President Dennis Teal at 936-327-5910 or Robert Herron 936-327-0838 in Polk County or Michael Smith 713-409-6020 in San Jacinto County.

"We stick together and can see it through... you've got a friend in me."
By Randy Newman



Above: PORTABLE AMATEUR RADIO—Polk County Coordinator Robert Herron shows how easy and inexpensive a licensed operator can construct an amateur radio and make it operative at any location. It can be used with a portable battery or regular current and is easily carried to different sites.



Left: DENNIS TEAL SHOWS THE RADIO ROOM— ULLWA President Dennis Teal shows the setup in the radio room located at the Emergency Management Office on Church Street. The radio room is where the licensed members help with communications during emergency situations and other public services. Members have spent many hours monitoring and communicating to shelters, Red Cross, law enforcement, ambulances and first responders.

Right: ULLWA OFFICERS AND MEMBERS—During a recent meeting of the Upper Lake Livingston Wireless Association, officers and some of the members that attended were left (front) Tom Sweeney and Michael Smith, (back) Robert Herron, Beverly Thompson, Sharon Cobb, Dennis Teal, Walter Teal, Terry Edwards and Warren Beard.

