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Ham Radio Field Day Connects Tyler County to World

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At precisely 1 p.m., Saturday, June 27, Tyler County connected with the world for its first Field Day as a group of ham radio enthusiasts gathered at the county Emergency Op Center in the Nutrition Center in Woodville.



Tyler County Amateur Radio Association held its first Field Day on Saturday, June 27, at the Tyler County Emergency Operations Center in Woodville. In the photo, mostly from left to right, are Tina Cleberg and daughter Victoria, Bruce Womack, Barbara Petri, TCARA Vice President Chuck Petri, Billie Yancy and her two granddaughters, Mia and Tatum Miller, EOC Emergency Coordinator Dale Freeman (back), James Wedgeworth and son Joseph, Johnnie and Earnest Matlock, U.S. Rep. Dr. Brian Babin, Floyd Petri, Jeremy Swan, Marc Holcomb, Jim Beattie, ARRL Emergency Coordinator Nick Toparcean and Tyler County Judge and Emergency Director Jacques Blanchette. See WD5TYL.org for all the members.

Easy—use a fishing pole to throw a line over a tree, pull the 160-meter wire antenna over, and in ten minutes you are on the air. All for about \$10! Nick Toparcean borrowed some black nylon trout line to anchor the antennae to the EOC window, strung the lead inside, and hooked it to the EOC ham radio. After a few adjustments, Toparcean had the capability to talk to the other side of the earth and—hold your breath—even to the International Space Station. Wow!

Talk about bouncing signals off the moon ... connecting to repeaters scattered from Galveston to southern Oklahoma ... Tyler County was a critical component for completing the last link to this chain of repeaters.

The Tyler County Amateur Radio Association began about two and a half years ago. V.P. Chuck Petri maintains the website, WD5TYL.org, and was the leader this day, as President Charles Zimmerman had to attend a funeral.

The repeater call sign and the club call sign are the same: WD5TYL. The TCARA requested this call sign from the FCC, which was granted just a few months ago. The repeater is located in Doucette and maintained by the TCARA. A repeater “repeats” or takes a weak signal and amplifies it in order to increase the distance of the signal, often called the radio horizon or footprint. Chuck’s father, Floyd Petri, maintains a private repeater in Chester.

The permission to install the Doucette repeater was secured by John Stagg and Brian Cater from the commissioner’s court in 2010, though several attempts to install a repeater failed. The TCARA partnered with the county EOC and successfully installed the current repeater.

“Amateur” radio does not mean “beginner or novice,” rather it refers to all those not in formal military, marine, aviation or police radio communications.

There are three levels of licensed radio operators, entry-level Technician, mid-level General and the top Extra Class license. The FCC extends operating privileges commensurate with each class, to help insure that operators understand the laws and operate safely.

Toparcean said, “Radio frequencies at the levels we use can be dangerous. Radio waves are radiation. Or one can damage expensive equipment if one overpowers or improperly tunes a transmitter.” He illustrated with a water pipe. The goal is for water to flow smoothly. But if a pipe gets choked, it constricts the water, and that is when problems can happen. The same applies to a radio signal. Just as you would want water to flow through a pipe with no leaks or restrictions, you want the radio signal to exit the antenna properly and as efficiently as possible.

The sophistication of the radio community might intimidate a novice, but there was an encouraging environment with plenty of resources. Very family friendly—this gathering had several husbands and wives, fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters.

There were six radios up and running: Earnest and Johnnie Matlock had one; Floyd Petri, one; his son Chuck Petri, two; Nick Toparcean ran the EOC one; Bruce Womack, one (who also does the fantastic computer-controlled Christmas light display each year).

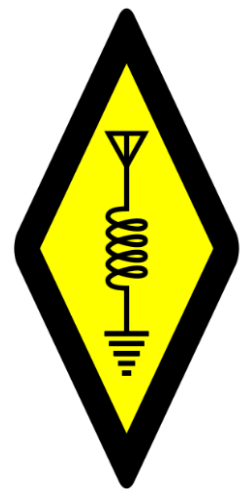
James Wedgeworth’s eleven-year-old son, Joseph, was there and ready to take his technician’s test. Several have been working on and off with radios for decades, like Floyd Petri since in 1957, but just got their first license in the last few years. They are growing fast.

Tina Cleberg’s daughter, Victoria, was practicing her code on the Morris Code training machine. The machine registered each dot or dash and confirmed when a proper letter was communicated. Victoria was gaining expertise as she composed whole words, next will be full sentences, and mom has promised to get Victoria her own machine.

In addition to a load of literature available for visitors, each station had a large poster of the available bands, color coded, with several of the primary frequency ranges. Each band was designated by meters, especially the high frequency bands, as in “10 meters” and “40 meters.” That refers to the length of the antennae, and the bands can go all the way up to the “160 meters.”

U.S. Rep. Dr. Brian Babin dropped by for this historic event in Tyler County, giving his hearty support for this crucial piece of emergency infrastructure, and reflected on how his father had used ham radios during WWII.

Tyler County Booster Editor Jim Powers has been a ham operator for 54-plus years and related a frightening encounter in Nov. of 1978. While taking traffic from Guyana, someone



**International Amateur
Radio Symbol**

needed a phone patch. Before long, Powers was relaying patches for Senator Barry Goldwater and others. A kook named Jim Jones had ordered his “Red Brigade” to shoot “defectors” at the Port Kaituma Airstrip, killing five, including U.S. Rep. Leo Ryan. Later that day, as news leaked out, Jones had led 909 followers with 304 children to drink cyanide laced Kool-Aid.

Ham radios allow communication during complete black outs. Even if the police bands fail, these radios can be up and running in minutes.

The American Radio Relay League, est. in 1914, hosts ARRL Field Day every year for a 27-hour marathon of national communication that crosses the globe. The goal is “To work as many stations as possible on any and all amateur bands ... and to learn to operate in abnormal situations” (see ARRL.org). Always on the fourth Saturday in June at precisely 1800 or 6 p.m. Zulu or Greenwich Mean Time, which is set at the Prime Meridian in Greenwich, England—in Woodville it was 1 p.m. because of daylight savings. Though points are accumulated for a variety types of connections logged, there are no awards given. Meant to be less competitive and more collaborative—this is serious fun.

The ARRL is the largest national association for amateur or “ham” radio operators in the U.S. with over 160k members. Field Day is education, practice and PR. They are a part of the International Amateur Radio Union which is organized in three regions: Region 2 has about 830k stations in the Americas, Region 3 about 750k in Asia and the Pacific Ocean, and Region 1 about 400k in Europe, Middle East, and Africa. There are about 3 million operators worldwide.

At the end of the day, Tyler County had communicated with hundreds across the nation. Chuck Petri said, “The farthest contact made during Field Day was by my mother, Barbara Petri, working digital on 20 meters. She contacted the US Navy Hospital Ship USNS Mercy off the coast of Bougainville Island in Papua, New Guinea.

The TCARA meets every first Thursday at 7 p.m. at 201 Veteran’s Way in Woodville, Texas. Visitors are welcome. Please see WD5TYL.org.



USNS Mercy navigates alongside USS Abraham Lincoln