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West Chester Hams to Host Field Day June 27-28 to Test Nation's ER Radio Communications

West Chester amateur radio fans are just a bunch of “hams”—literally as well as figuratively.

The West Chester Amateur Radio Association (WCARA) will show off to the public its expertise providing critical communication during emergencies on June 27-28 on the front lawn of the historic, art deco National Voice of America Museum of Broadcasting.

The 50-member group will join about 30,000 ham radio operators nationwide for the American Radio Relay League's (ARRL) annual Field Day. Its purpose is to provide a

comprehensive evaluation of our nation's emergency radio capabilities as well as inspire a new generation of ham radio operators. Admission is free.

“We want people to come, bring their families and see that this is not your grandfather's radio anymore,” said John Graves, vice president of WCARA. “We have a good time while doing interesting and serious work. The communications networks that ham radio operators can quickly create have saved many lives in the past, when other systems failed or were overloaded.”

West Chester hams will demonstrate the capability of local amateur radio operators to conduct emergency radio communications off the power grid for an extended period of time and show how to send messages in many forms without the use of phone systems, internet or any other infrastructure that can be compromised in a crisis.

Over the past year, the news has been full of reports of ham radio operators providing critical communications in emergencies including the California wildfires, Oregon and Michigan storms, tornadoes and other events world-wide, according to an ARRL news release. During Hurricane Katrina in 2005, amateur radio communication was often the only way people could communicate and hundreds of volunteer hams traveled south to save lives and property, said the release.

“It's important to understand that our current mobile technology is wonderful when it works,” said Jack Dominic, executive director of the National VOA Museum of Broadcasting. “The fact is that for it to work requires countless devices and circuits. Even a simple phone call across town will route your conversation in such a way that it will pass hundreds of points of potential failure. Most of the time all works flawlessly, but during storms or other disasters, we have already seen that it can fail. The simple point-to-point amateur radio communication is

something we just might want to keep around. The time will certainly come when we will need it.”

Field Day testing begins Saturday, June 27 at 2 p.m. and runs continuously for 24 hours until Sunday, June 28 at 2 p.m. Visitors who approach the trailers and tents in front of the VOA museum building at 8070 Tylersville Road can learn how to operate a radio station and get their own FCC radio license before the next disaster strikes, said Graves.

WCARA operates radio station WC8VOA from the VOA museum building. To learn more about local amateur radio, go to www.wc8voa.org or contact Graves at jmgravес@fuse.net.